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POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORICISM: THE CASE OF COLLINGWOOD

by

R. KURT TAYLOR

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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To the lion who taught us how to read, and about justice and other important things.

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I attempt to characterize a broadly influential ontological / epistemological view called historicism. This contemporary current of philosphic thought, having its origins in the thought of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and others of lesser influence, has as its central tenet the assertion that all being is essentially in flux and that all human behaviour and thought is historically determined, or relative to time and place. As such, then, historicism poses a most radical challange to the Western tradition of political thought as it was given shape at its beginning by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Historicism asserts that all thought is mere ideology, and that the thought of each of the great political philosophers is at best relevant only to the particular historical epoch in which it was propounded. This assertion challenges political philosophy at its core, for that tradition proceeds from the assumption that it is possible for men to know truths which are relevant in the fullest sense for all times and places.

By way of characterizing the challenge that historicism poses for political philosophy, I examine the work of two fairly recent thinkers, Leo Strauss and R. G. Collingwood. Since I believe that the practical consequences of accepting the historicist view of reality are grave indeed, I try to answer its challenge to political philosophy via argument at the epistemological level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
PREFACE	vii
PART I: The Meaning of "Historicism"	1
PART II: Historicism as a Challenge to Political Thought	34
PART III: R.G. Collingwood's Progressivist Historicism	89

PREFACE

Professor George Grant has written an essay entitled Time as History, in which he examines the problem of historicism as it has been revealed for us in the thought of Friedrich Neitzsche. In that essay, it is Grant's observation, an easily defensible one, I think, that "English has become the predominant language through which the culture of the Western world expresses itself throughout the globe". He spends the first chapter of that essay in making the case that the word "history" has come to have a very important place in that almost world language: "'History' is one of the key words in which the English speaking people now express what they think they are and what they think the world to be." He gives the reader a couple of examples of what he means:

> And in that language the word 'history' comes from lips and pens near the centre of what is most often said. 'History will judge my Vietnam policies' says a President. 'This is a history-making flight' says an astronaut. 'History' demands, commands, requires, obliges, teaches, etc., etc.

Recently, I watched on television a filmclip of the President of the United States at last welcoming the leader of the Communist Chinese nation to his country. The President's speech emphasized, at more than one point, that he regarded that moment as an "historic" one, and no-one could doubt that, by his use of that term, he was intending to convey to his audience the great importance of that event. For English speakers, "an historic event" is an event which is of paramount importance.

For Professor Grant, there are other words - "freedom" and "value", "science" and "nature" - which are also at the core of the way we English speakers speak, think, and act, but:

> ... 'history' has particular significance because it is one of those words which is present for us and was not present in any similar sense in the languages of other civilizations - including those from which ours sprang. Therefore if we desire to understand our own understanding of ourselves, it is well to think about this word which has come to have such a unique connotation amongst us.[2]

Almost exactly a century earlier, Nietzsche himself wrote an essay in which he pointed to the extent to which esteem of history had come to characterize Western intellectual and political life, at that time spearheaded more by German than English speakers.[3] For Nietzsche, the role of "history" in the world had only been discovered in the 19th century, and previous generations of men had failed to recognize and acknowledge the central importance of "history" in their lives. This was a belief which had been held by a few thinkers previous to Nietzsche, and which would be echoed by more than a few after him. I, following Grant and others of like mind, am persuaded that this belief is one which is changing, in the most radical manner, the way in which Western men, and therefore, probably, all men, view the world and their place in it. On this assumption, it behooves us to attempt to better understand the role that "history" has come to play in our thinking.

I intend the following essay to be a beginning in that task. The essay is also intended to be a study in political

philosophy, although the reader may notice that it contains little explicit philosophizing about politics. Rather, I shall concern myself with examining the very possibility of philosophizing about politics in any meaningful way, for I think that we live in a time in which one must do the former before one can do the latter. Before one can investigate politics, one must engage in metaphysical debate concerning whether or not one can hope to have knowledge about politics at all; that is, if "knowledge" means an understanding of things which is permanently true and rationally grounded. This, then, will be an essay concerned with the challenge that one metaphysical position, one mode of thinking about the world - historicism - poses to the very possibility of rational speculation about political matters, or to traditional political philosophy. That is, I shall speak broadly, and for the most part at the epistemological level, about the problem of having knowledge about politics, this being a matter which is logically prior to anything more specific that we might say about political life.

By way of confronting the issue of historicism vs. political philosophy as traditionally understood, I shall examine the opposing thoughts of two recent writers: the one, Leo Strauss, being an interpreter of the Western tradition of political philosophy and perhaps deserving to be thought of as a political philosopher in his own right; and the other, R.G. Collingwood, being an English teacher of historicist philosophy. Aside from the fact that most of Strauss's work can be read as having been

undertaken in reply to positivism and historicism, I have chosen to consider his thought in this essay because I have found it to be persuasive, both in reference to interpreting the history of political thought, and in connection with philosophizing about politics. I shall say more about why I have chosen Collingwood as a representative of the historicist persuasion in my explicit consideration of his thought in Part III of this essay.

To have dealt conclusively with the problem of historicism's challenge to political philosophy, one would have had to have done a much more extensive examination of both historicist writing and of the history of political thought than I have attempted here. One would have had to write indepth characterizations of the thoughts of many more thinkers, from both sides of the debate, than I have attempted in this study. I have characterized historicism's challenge to political philosophy only at a very general level, with special emphasis on epistemological issues as they can be seen to relate to politics. Consequently, the reader cannot help but be aware of more than one significant lacuna in what follows. This being said, however, and believing as I do that the problems which occupied political philosophers throughout most of our tradition are inescapable in that the practice of our daily living requires answers to them, I think that an attempt, even in a relatively short essay such as this, to deal in general terms with the challenge of historicism, is useful despite its being inconclusive.

The study is broken into three parts. In Part I, I shall discuss the various connotations of the word "historicism", and show how its meaning has changed since it first entered academic discourse, as well as going some way towards characterizing historicism's challenge to traditional ways of thinking about politics. In Part II, I shall do two things. I shall attempt to characterize in general terms the Western tradition of political thought, and will subsequently move to an exegisis of Strauss's explicit defence of the possibility of political philosophy in the face of historicism's challenge to it. In Part III, I shall examine R.G. Collingwood's peculiarly progressivist historicism in some detail, and hope to show how we may doubt both the claims of Collingwood, and of historicism in general.

NOTES TO PREFACE

[1]George Grant, Time as History (C.B.C. Massey Lectures, 1969), p.1.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Friedrich Nietzsche, The Use and Abuse of History, trans. by Adrian Collins (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1949). First published in 1874.

PART I: THE MEANING OF "HISTORICISM".

> The world of external objects and of psychic experience appears to be in a continuous flux. Verbs are more adequate symbols for this situation than nouns.
>
> Karl Mannheim[1]

Despite the modern tendency towards compartmentalization of academic endeavour in general, and despite the tendency towards compartmentalization of epistimological inquiry in particular, what develops in one "field" of inquiry most often redounds upon other fields. Eugene Miller has argued, in an especially pertinent (and, I think, insightful) article entitled "Positivism, Historicism, and Political Inquiry",[2] that in the last twenty-five to thirty years, political inquiry, and Western intellectual life in general, has come to be characterized by an ascendent theory of knowledge that Miller calls "historicism". It is Miller's project in that article to make a case for the ubiquitousness, as well as for the embracive consequences, of that theory of knowledge. He begins his paper with a quotation from Karl Mannheim's essay, "Historicism":

> Historicism has developed into an intellectual force of extraordinary significance; it epitomizes our Weltanschauung (world view). The historicist principle not only organizes, like an invisible hand, the work of the cultural sciences (Geisteswissen-schaften), but also permeates everyday thinking.[3]

Mannheim, himself an historicist according to Miller's understanding of that term, has captured, in those two short sentences, much of the significance that Miller wants to ascribe to historicism. Others have also indicated a belief in that

significance. Hans Meyerhoff, in a useful introduction to an anthology of writings on the philosophy of history, says the following:

> Historicism opens a new chapter in the study of history. Friedrich Meinecke, who wrote the classic work on its origins, described historicism as "the greatest spiritual revolution of the Western world". He compared it to the Reformation; Lord Acton, to the Copernican revolution. These judgements are hyperbolical, but there is no doubt that the contemporary situation in the theory of history, and culture in general, is unintelligible without an appreciation of the meaning and consequences of historicism. "Today none of us, no matter where our particular interests may lie, can escape its all-pervasive influence."[4]

Both Meinecke's and Acton's judgements on the significance of historicism may be thought of as being "hyperbolical" if one reads them as if they were intended to be a judgement upon the intellectual achievement that that theory of knowledge represents. If, however, they are also read as judgements upon the actual, historical influence of historicism, then they may not be at all "hyperbolical." For what in many instances began as a theory of knowledge which was meant to apply primarily to the specific practice of historiography - the academic discipline devoted to the telling of the story of man's past - came to be thought of by many as an all-encompassing philosophy, containing at its core a theory of knowledge which totally revised man's thinking about his own behaviour, and the universe he inhabits.

In what follows, we shall note that the term "historicism" has encompassed various shades of meaning,, especially with reference to the epistemological consequences that have been

seen to accrue from holding such a belief about the nature of things. Different writers have chosen to emphasize certain aspects of historicist philosophy while ignoring others, and this has had the consequence of changing the meaning of "historicism" significantly from time to time. In discussing these various meanings by way of showing that the word historicism has come to have a fairly precise and widely accepted meaning in contemporary academic discourse, I rely to a considerable extent on two seminal articles on the meaning of the term: one by Maurice Mandelbaum, entitled simply, "Historicism", and the other by Dwight E. Lee and Robert N. Beck, entitled, "The Meaning of Historicism."[5] In my synthetic exposition of these two articles, I have expanded their discussions of certain authors whose thinking is especially important as background for this thesis.

a) Carl Menger

Mandelbaum places the entry of "historicism" into the arena of scholarly consideration previous to W.W.I. The word is an English translation of the German word Historismus, and its earliest usage seems to have occurred in certain methodological debates among German-speaking political economists. Historismus was a term used by Carl Menger to describe and criticize the theories of a school of his contemporaries who, he thought, tended to make economic theory unduly dependent upon economic history. Thus, Menger used the word in a depreciatory sense, and Historismus came to suggest a certain "inappropriate use of historical knowledge and a confusion regarding the sorts of questions which could be answered by means of such knowledge."[6]

b) Ernst Troeltsch

However, says Mandelbaum, it was not until the period immediately following W.W.I that the term came to be used widely. Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), a Christian philosopher and sociologist (and, incidentally, a close fiend of Max Weber) made an attempt to clarify the meaning of the term "historicism" by way of examining its origins and by attempting to relieve it of its polemical overtones. As Mandelbaum puts it, "Troeltsch used 'historicism' to mean a tendency to view all knowledge and all forms of experience in a context of historical change."[7] Troeltsch was the first to make explicit reference to what was to become a common feature of historicist thought: he recognized that there was an obvious tension between "historical" thinking and

"scientific" thinking. He regarded the tendency toward historical thinking as one of the two great discoveries of modern thought, the other, of course, being the generalizing, quantifying, "scientific" approach which he termed Naturalismus. For Troeltsch, Historismus and Naturalismus were two entirely different Weltanschauungen. While himself believing that all knowledge and all forms of human experience are caught up in a process of change, Troeltsch nevertheless sought to overcome the sort of moral and intellectual relativism/skepticism that such a belief leads to. Much of his work apparently represents an attempt to wrestle with this inevitable "crisis of historicism," or with the dilemma that historical relativity poses for Christian universal ethics.[8]

Parenthetically, it is perhaps unfortunate that Troeltsch's work has been left relatively obscure by the fact that it is as yet unavailable in English translation. However, as I hope to show presently, the problem that historicism poses for political philosophy[9] can be effectively examined by concentrating on the thought of R.G. Collingwood, himself an important contributor to that still-evolving genre of thought.

c) Karl Mannheim

Mannheim was a German sociologist and one-time student of Max Weber who was also deeply influenced by Karl Marx.[10] His work has been influential in developing the "sociology of knowledge" approach to understanding human thinking. Immediately after the appearance of Troeltsch's work, in 1924, Mannheim

published a lengthy essay, entitled "Historicism", from which I have already quoted in reference to Miller's aforementioned article, and in which, as that quotation shows, he characterized historicism as a basic Weltanschaunng. Mannheim subscribed to a radically temporalistic view of the world: he felt that all socio-cultural reality was dominated by change. According to Mannheim, modern men, or at least, modern European men, are characterized most importantly by their manifesting an historicist Weltanschauung: they "experience every segment of the spiritual-intellectual world as in a state of flux and growth."[11] We moderns have come to hold this world view as a result of the popular dissemination of "books about the evolution of institutions, customs, religions, psychic contents, etc."[12]

Unlike Troeltsch, Mannheim was not disturbed by the relativization of morality, ethics, or "values" that an historicist philosophy would seem to entail. Rather, he was concerned to affirm that realization. However, he did not think that the historical relativity of ethics necessarily resulted in skepticism regarding them, for, as Mandelbaum puts it, he "believed that all values are rooted in the conditions of social existence and their discovery is not dependent upon possession of some unchanging capacity for moral insight."[13] Thus, it seems likely that Mannheim subscribed to what I would like to call the "Spirit of the Age" theory of morality: moralities change from age to age, but one may identify the system of ethics that is appropriate for one's own time and place (having arisen more-or-less automatically and in harmony with it) and live by it. Sociology

is the science whereby the "Spirit" of each age may be identified.

Nor did Mannheim think that historicism entailed a necessary "intellectual skepticism." As Mandelbaum puts it, Mannheim believed that "intellectual skepticism could be avoided through a recognition of the perspectival character of knowledge, and by means of the capacity of a sociology of knowledge to uncover the nature of divergent perspectives and reconcile them with one another."[14] Mannheim felt that historicist theory could manage to "derive an ordering principle" from the "seeming anarchy of change," that it could manage to "penetrate the innermost structure of this all-pervading change."[15] The following abstractions from Mannheim's "Historicism" essay capture something of the flavour of Mannheim's answer to the intellectually relativistic tendency of historicism:

> In every event, then, there is something other than the event 'itself.' The event is moulded by a totality, either in the sense of a law of patterning or in the sense of a principle of systematization.[16]
>
> Thus with the systematization of historicism itself, a destiny is fulfilled which historicism had to discover for all the past forms of the world process: that life has the constant tendency to ossify itself into a system.[17]
>
> To extract out of the many-sided reality its slowly changing pattern and the structure of its inner balance, is the aim and at the same time the anticipated final vision of a fully developed historicism.[18]

At the end of Mannheim's essay, one is left wondering what the "final vision of a fully-developed historicism" looks like: one wonders what Mannheim thought would be the "law of patterning" or "principle of systematization" that would make

history intelligible. He does not subscribe to either the materialism of Marx or the idealism of Hegel, at least not expressly. The question that one wants to raise here, the question of how to know the truth about history (or indeed, the truth about anything) once one has posited the historicity of all things, is one that naturally arises again and again in trying to comprehend historicism. Mannheim's work is important in that he explicitly attempts to defend historicism against the charge that it is inherently relativistic and paradoxical. Although I shall not examine Mannheim's work in any greater detail, I shall examine the problem of the paradoxicality of historicism in general, and in particular with reference to Collingwood's thought.

d) Friedrich Meinecke

According to Mandelbaum, Friedrich Meinecke (1862-1954) contributed a significant addition to the meaning of "historicism." Meinecke was a distinguished historian who also evinced a keen interest in moral or ethical problems, and hence, in political philosophy.[19] He was in agreement with both Troeltsch and Mannheim that historicism constituted an opposition to a "static" view of the world, and that it was therefore a radically different way of thinking than that which characterized both the natural sciences and those political philosophies which had relied upon a conception of universal and unchanging natural law. However, whereas both Troeltsch's and Mannheim's characterizations of historicism had emphasized the concepts of change and development, Meinecke's use of the term, says Mandelbaum, emphasized a

"view of the world in terms of an interest in that which is concrete, unique, and individual."[20] It is perhaps not surprising that Meinecke would use "historicism" in conjunction with such an emphasis, in view of the fact that he was an historian, and made it his principal business to ferret out the facts with respect to the "concrete", the "unique", and the "individual." Since he agreed with Troeltsch and Mannheim that the fundamental significance of historicism lies in a belief in the radical temporality of all things, his subtle shift of emphasis with respect to the meaning of "historicism" might be regarded as a minor academic point. However, it is also worthwhile to note that Meinecke's emphasis on individuality in history rather than its process(es) of change and development did not lead him to a confrontation with value relativism, as did historicism for Troeltsch.

e) Benedetto Croce

According to Mandelbaum, Meinecke's characterization of historicismm can perhaps best be compared to that of Benedetto Croce. Croce (1866-1952), the "best-known Italian philosopher of this century,"[21] is important to our purposes here both because in his writings one finds some of the most succinct and explicit expressions of the tenets and consequences of historicism, and because he was obviously much admired by R.G. Collingwood.[22]

Croce called his "philosophy of the spirit" absolute historicism.[23] He believed that all reality is radically historical: he begins an essay entitled "Historicism and its History" with the following statement:

> "Historicism" (the science of history), scientifically speaking, is the affirmation that life and reality are history and history alone.[24]

He follows with a denunciation of the sort of "transcendentalism" that has been most often associated with Hegel:

> The necessary corollary to this affirmation is the negation of the theory which holds that reality can be divided into super-history and history, into a world of ideas and values and a lower world which reflects them, or has reflected them until now in a fleeting and imperfect way, and upon which they must once and for all be imposed, so that an imperfect history, or mere history, may give way to a rational and perfect reality. Since this second conception is known as "abstract rationalism" or "illuminism", the science of history opposes and argues with "illuminism" and rises above it.[25]

Thus, Croce's philosophy has been called both "humanist" and/or "idealist". He reacted against both positivism and materialism. He regarded history as the self-development of the human spirit. He opposed himself to the sort of historicism, exemplified by Marx, which "attempts to interpret history naturalistically, that is, in ways similar to those used by the sciences in dealing with the non-human world."[26] Croce used the term "historicism" in reference to his own brand of "radical metaphysical idealism." As Professor Mandelbaum puts it:

> ... since Croce, as an idealist,, wished to deny that there was any realm of existence external to the human spirit, he interpreted the whole of reality as being encompassed within history: life and reality were nothing but the ever-changing manifestations of the spirit.[27]

For Croce, genuine knowledge, as opposed to merely practical

or psuedo-knowledge, came only from an understanding of history. Thus, his view of what historicism is comes close to that of Meinecke: both thought that attempts to grasp the world in generalizing, naturalistic terms were totally inadequate (again quoting Professor Mandelbaum) "because of the uniqueness and individuality of what is historical."[28] It was this desire to cut the cord binding history to science, the cord of "naturalism", that also endeared Croce to Collingwood. As Collingwood says in The Idea of History:

> It was the clean cut which he [Croce] made in 1893 between the idea of history and the idea of science that enabled him to develop the conception of history so much further than any philosopher of his generation.[29]

In summation then, Croce was a "humanist" historicist in this sense: he championed Vico as the true father of historicism, because Vico argued that history was the process of the development of human liberty, whereas Hegel had posited that there was some "Spirit" above and outside of human willing which animated and directed human history. He was also opposed to those conceptions of historicism which would explain human behaviour as being "naturalistically" determined:

> We must not, however, forget that there was a German in the other camp belonging to the left wing of the German Hegelian school, Marx, who in that quality and in that school where interest had been transferred from political to economic contrasts, produced a teleological materialistic historicalism without a breath of humanity or liberty: Marx was nearer than one imagines to Prussianism and to its cult of brutal force.[30]

Croce's historicist ontology/epistimology is consciously meant to serve as a rational support for the idea of human liberty. In this central thrust of his thought, Croce proves himself to be a most "modern" thinker (in opposition to older, "classical" modes of thought) and placed himself squarely in the camp of the sort of "radical" historicism with which this essay is most importantly concerned. I shall also want to say something about another belief of Croce's, so characteristic of several variations of radical historicist thought, that historicism's relativization of morals, ethics, or "values" does not destroy their validity, but on the contrary, revitalizes them, giving them an "inexhaustible vitality" by "planting them integrally in the reality of history."[31]

Before going on to formulate a general definition of historicism, and to showing to what sorts of thinking it may be said to apply, as well as showing how such thought may be said to represent a fundamental challenge to the possibility of political philosophy, it is necessary to say something about at least two more extant usages of "historicism", and so to avoid the sort of confusion that such usages may give rise to. These usages of the word have entered contemporary philosophic literature due to the influence, on the one hand, of Karl Popper and Friedrich A. Hayek, and on the other hand, via the current debate among Marxist academics over the work of Louis Althusser and his former student, Nicos Poulantzas.

f) Karl Popper

Popper views the term "historicism" as being a word that one uses to describe what has elsewhere been called "metahistory" or "speculative philosophy of history." Thus, for Popper, one is an historicist if one believes that one has a theory of history which explains why events occur in the manner and order that they do, and that future events can be predicted on the basis of one's theory.

> What I mean by "historicism" will be explained at length in this study. It will be enough if I say here that I mean by 'historicism' an approach to the social sciences which assumes that historical prediction is their principle aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns', the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history.[32]

Popper feels that he can demonstrate the poverty of the speculative philosophy of history approach by showing that: (1) the course of human history is strongly influenced by the growth of human knowledge; (2) we cannot predict, by rational or scientific methods, the future growth of our scientific knowledge, and; (3) we cannot, therefore, predict the future course of human history.[33]

I shall not examine Professor Popper's attempt to refute the very possibility of metahistorical speculation in this essay, feeling as I do that it is a matter which is peripheral to my primary purpose. Nor shall I enter, or even attempt to characterize, the debate, so much an integral part of both Hayek's and Popper's objections to what they call "historicism", as to whether one

can speak of social "wholes" or not. By these omissions, however, I do not mean to imply that Popper's central question, the problem of whether or not one can give a theoretical (that is to say, "scientific") account of the historical "process", is a question which is unimportant or irrelevant to our purpose of investigating the general problem of historicism at the epistemological level. One sees, I think, that if there were some set of rigidly deterministic laws of history, if history had a rationale and/or a direction, human behaviour, and hence, thought (since thought is prior to behaviour) would be to some appreciable extent determined by history. This is, of course, something similar to the assertion characteristic of what I shall call "theoretical" historicism, as exemplified by Hegel, Marx, and seemingly, Mannheim. That is, theoretical historicism asserts that thought in every epoch is decisively shaped by forces which are independent of the individual. It is the distinguishing tenet of historicist thought that the individual is constrained by the circumstances of his life to think the way he does, and theoretical historicists believe that history's constraints on our thinking are identifiable and rationally analysable, not to say, directional, leading us to some "end of history." Theoretical historicism asserts that History has a plan for man, be History "deified", as per the Hegelian conception, or thought of as being purely "materialistic", as per "scientific" Marxism. However, this having been said about the connection between Popper's usage of "historicism" and the one I employ in this essay, I would like to point out that there is a significant degree of incongruence

between Popper's employment of the term and the meaning that is more generally ascribed to the word in the majority of literature on the subject. As I hope to show below, Popper's emphasis upon the putative predictive capacities of some historicist theories is misplaced, since it draws attention away from the relativism that is inherent in the concept of historicism. Indeed, Popper's usage of the term "historicism" to refer exclusively to theoretical historicism does not lead him to confront what I shall refer to as "radical" historicism, this being a variation of historicism which, I hope to show below, poses a more fundamental challenge to the possibility of permanently grounded theoretical knowledge than does its theoretical counterpart. In obscuring the relativistic tendencies of historicist thought, Popper's employment of "historicism" in effect muddies the water with respect to academic debate on the subject.[34]

g. Louis Althusser/Nicos Poulantzas

The Althusserian/Poulantzasian usage of the term "historicism" seems, at least on the face of it, to be an attempt to give the term a meaning which is quite different from any of the meanings that we have considered so far, or that we will use subsequently. This particular usage arises primarily out of an attempt to clarify the problem of how to read the classic texts of Marxism, and especially, out of the problem of how to treat Marx's so-called "Early Writings." Thus, the Althusserian usage of "historicism" arises from a new attempt to define Marxist science. In the case of Poulantzas, this "neo-Marxist" concept of historicism

also figures in an attempt to write the definitive Marxist account of politics that Marx himself was unable to finish. In sum, Althusser and Poulantzas have promulgated what seems to be a new meaning of "historicism" in the process of attempting to properly define Marx's conception of society and carry it to a more thoroughly explicated stage of development. The Althusserian position on what the correct form of Marxist science is is very complex, and I shall attempt no more than a brief and very general exposition of it for purposes of this thesis.[35]

Althusserian marxists, if I may use that term for a moment, are concerned to repudiate Marx's so-called "Early Manuscripts", or the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. Therein, say Althusser and his followers, Marx is an "historicist": his work shows a definite break, an "epistemological rupture", a change of "problematic", or, in short, a radical alteration of philosophical orientation after 1844. Beginning with The German Ideology, written for the purposes of self-clarification in 1845-46, Marx, according to the Althusserians, gave up the "historicist" epistemology that he had held to in his early writings, and began to develop the mature conception that is revealed most fully in Capital.

How, then, are Marx's pre-1845 writings "historicist"? For Althusser's Marxists, in those writings, Marx is under the spell of a certain sort of Hegelian conception of man's place in the scheme of things, and of how his history unfolds. In the Early Writings, Marx can be seen to speak of a (mythical) "essence" of man. That is, he seems to speak of an eternal,

ahistorical nature of man, which, he tells us in those essays, man has managed to "alienate" himself from by the way in which he has organized himself socially. This apparently led Marx to posit a revolutionary theory in which man would finally achieve a life which was true to his real "essence", thereby overcoming the "alienation" of that essence that his social life had always exhibited previously.

For Althusserians, to read this early position as being Marx's true and final position is to refuse to recognize an irreconcilable gap in Marx's writings. In his pre-1845 works, Marx emphasized the essence of things, of "individual categories", and was thus "situated in an individualist problematic", or seemed to subscribe to an epistemological position somewhat representative of the Humean empiricism of his day. That position on how to gain knowledge about the world suggests that one concentrate upon individual entities, and seek to uncover their unique essence, thus defining them. Mature Marxism, say the Althusserians, eschews consideration of the essences of individual entities and rather concentrates upon the relations, or the dialectical interplay, that accrues between observable entities in man's social universe. The "individualist problematic" that infects Marx's Early Works posits the notion that man will regain his alienated essence in socialist, post-revolutionary society: it is to posit that man qua man, or "man" as an individual essence among a universe of such essentially defined things, can finally come to realize his eternal essence. For Althusserian Marxists, such an epistemological position is "historicist": it is to posit

that there is a non-material essence to at least one thing in the universe, ie. man, and that "History", as some sort of non-material, or perhaps better, extra-material force, allows man to recapture his ideal essence. For Althusser and Poulantzas, Marx was an "historicist" (à la Hegel) in his early writings because he "deified" History. He conceived of History as deserving to be written with a capital "H" so to speak: he thought of History as an omnipotent, extra-material presence, and this conception of History entirely disappears in his later, mature dialectical materialism. For the Althusserians, only in 1845 did Marx finally free himself of the spell of Hegelian idealism, and begin to explicate his unique philosophical materialism.

Parenthetically, we are perhaps now in a position to see how the Althusserian Marxists employ the term "historicism" in a manner which is, in a sense,, almost entirely opposite to the way in which it is normally used, and to the employment that I make of it in this essay. I would venture to say that Marx's Early Writings are the one place where Marx's work deviates least radically from traditional thinking about man and his life, for there, especially in the essay "Estranged Labor", he seems to render an account of the eternal essence of man, or of the nature of man. Specifically, Marx seems there to argue that man is a being who realizes his nature in work. Whatever the truth is about what Marx was up to in his Early Writings, it is <u>this</u> that the Althusserians call "historicism", being concerned to differentiate Marxism from Hegelianism, while I would call Marx's <u>later</u> works historicist, for there he admits

to no eternal, ahistorical nature for man, and rather asserts that man changes fundamentally from epoch to epoch. According to the normally accepted usage of the term "historicism", Marx's early works, of all his writings, are the least obviously historicist in character.

Despite the existence of the several usages of the term "historicism", with their varying meanings and/or emphasis of different aspects of such a view of the world, there is, or at least, there is evolving, an academic agreement over the use of the term. This agreement accrues from recognition that the crux of the problem regarding historicist thought is its tendency towards epistemological and/or ethical relativism.

h) The Lee/Beck Definition

Writing in the 1953-54 edition of the American Historical Review, Dwight E. Lee and Robert N. Beck offer a discussion attempting to detail the evolution of the meaning of "historicism." As does Mandelbaum, Lee and Beck show that "historicism" originally denoted a fairly innocuous belief, held primarily by historiographers of one sort or another, that any explanation of anything whatsoever, and especially, an explanation of human affairs, ought to take proper account of history. This almost immediately, or perhaps simultaneously, became, in the words of Morris R. Cohen, "a belief that history is the main road to wisdom in human affairs."[36] Lee and Beck give two other, relatively early definitions of historicism which both convey the idea that "historicism has to do with explanation or evaluation by means of history

and with the belief that historical knowledge is in some sense distinctively important in human affairs:"[37]

> [Historicism is] the view that the history of anything is a sufficient explanation of it, that the values of anything can be accounted for through the discovery of its origins, that the nature of anything is entirely comprehended in its development. ... The doctrine which discounts the fallaciousness of the historical fallacy.[38]

> That attitude which was centered around history, which saw most of the spheres of intellectual life as permeated by history, which made history the majistra, if not of active life, at least, to a great extent, of theoretical life, will be identified here under the term "historicism."[39]

It is an interesting question, both in the philosophic and in the "sociological" sense, as to whether or not the conception of historicism which emphasizes the importance of a concern for history necessarily leads to a conception of the historicity of things, which in turn necessarily entails a relativization of knowledge and/or ethics. What is important for our purposes here, however, is to realize that the term "historicism" did in fact come to refer precisely to just that sort of relativism. Lee and Beck give one definition which has been offered by Louis Gottschalk, and which clearly captures the relativistic tendencies of historicism:

> That belief, which would deny the validity of absolute principles in history, is sometimes called historical relationism or historicism. It insists upon the relation of ideas to historical circumstances (including other ideas); it maintains that ideas are only "reflex functions of the sociological conditions under which they arose."[40]

In Gottschalk's definition, we can begin to see clearly the consequences that historicism has for all fields of human thought, rather than its being an important question only for historiographers. In particular, we can begin to infer the consequences for philosophic thought that fall out of historicist epistemology.

At the conclusion of their article on the meaning of historicism, Lee and Beck attempt to formulate two definitions which could be said to encompass all extant usages of the term. (These definitions exclude, of course, the Popper/Hayek usage, which Lee and Beck judge to be an unfortunate aberration, and the Althusserian Marxists' usage of "historicism", also an aberration, and one which Lee and Beck could not have been aware of, writing in 1953.) The first definition is a very broad, general one, which encompasses early uses of the term, ie., those that did not emphasize historical relativism:

> (a) the belief that the truth, meaning, and value of anything, ie., the basis of any evaluation, is to be found in its history.

The second definition is more specific, and is much closer to the way in which we shall be using "historicism" throughout the balance of this essay:

> (b) the antipositivistic and antinaturalistic view that historical knowledge is a basic, or the only, requirement for understanding and evaluating man's present political, social, and intellectual position or problems.[41]

In this last definition of Lee and Beck's, as in the earlier Gottschalk definition, we can begin to infer the character of the fundamental challenge that historicism presents to positivistic

natural and social science, and to traditional political philosophy. It is primarily historicism's challenge to the great tradition of written political philosophy that gives rise to the last definition of the term that we shall consider here, that being the definition which is central to the consideration of the problem of historicism that has been undertaken by Leo Strauss, and carried on by those who share his philosophic approach.

i) Leo Strauss

While I do not claim to have mastered the complete range of Strauss's thought, I feel I can confidently assert that the problem of historicism was for Strauss a very large one indeed, and that much of his work can be read as representing a sometimes explicit but more often implicit reply to historicism's challenge to the extant tradition of political philosophy, of which Professor Strauss was a most serious student. It is clear that Strauss shared the traditional view that philosophy was of more than theoretical interest, that it typically had profound practical consequences; and he went so far as to state that historicism was one of the root causes of what Spengler called "the decline of the West."

Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), a German historiographer and philosopher of history, is probably best known for his considable work, The Decline of the West. For Spengler, a student of Nietzsche's philosophy, history had no "center or ultimate point of reference", no direction of development, either progressive or regressive, and hence, no ultimate meaning.[42] The only

meaning one finds in history is that which can be ascribed to individual cultures, and there are an indefinite number of these entities, which "grow with the same superb aimlessness of the flowers of the field." Cultures wax and wane: they are born, grow to brilliance, and fade away, to be supplanted by yet more cultures. According to Spengler, the culture of the West had already passed its flowering, and could be seen to be on the decline.

Without subscribing either to Spengler's "organic" characterizations of cultures, or to the historicist metaphysic that is the philosophic basis for Spengler's thought, Strauss agreed that the West seems to be in decline. And indeed, for Strauss it is the very historicism that is represented by Spengler (and the many other thinkers such as those already mentioned herein) that is to a not insignificant extent responsible for the West's decline, or of the "crisis of modernity", as Strauss sometimes characterized it. At the beginning of an essay entitled "The Three Waves of Modernity," Strauss had this to say:

> The crisis of modernity reveals itself in the fact, or consists in the fact, that modern western man no longer knows what he wants - that he no longer believes that he can know what is good and bad, what is right and wrong. Until a few generations ago, it was generally taken for granted that men can know what is right and wrong, what is the just or the good or the best order of society - in a word that political philosophy is possible and necessary. In our time this faith has lost its power. According to the dominant view, political philosophy is impossible: it was a dream, perhaps a noble dream, but at any rate, a dream.[43]

According to Strauss, there are two root causes for the opinion that political philosophy was based on a fundamental error. One is the metaphysical assertion that there is a fundamental distinction between "facts" and "values", and that there can be no meaningful knowledge of the answers to questions of value. Thus, on this view, there can be no wholly rational discourse, no wholly rational theory, about man's ultimate purposes. The second source for the modern conviction that there can be no objective political philosophy is the notion that all of reality is historical:

> According to a less widespread but more sophisticated view, the predominant separation of facts from values is not tenable: the categories of theoretical understanding imply, somehow, principles of evaluation; but these principles of evaluation together with the categories of understanding are historically variable; they change from epoch to epoch; hence it is impossible to answer the question of right and wrong or of the best social order in a universally valid manner, in a manner valid for all historical epochs, as political philosophy requires.[44]

For Strauss, then, the crisis of modernity was primarily the crisis of modern political philosophy. Political philosophy, not for the first time in its long history, was facing a fundamental challenge to its very existence as a pursuit of thinking men, and was probably losing the battle.

I earlier referred to Eugene Miller's 1972 article, "Positivism, Historicism and Political Inquiry." Professor Miller is apparently a close student of Strauss's thought, and shares Strauss's recognition of historicism as being an important, indeed, fundamental

challenge to the possibility of political philosophy. Strauss, Miller, and others of like mind have a broad definition of historicism which emphasizes what for them is its essence: its epistemological relativism. Near the beginning of his article, Professor Miller claims the following:

> By 1950, positivism was virtually dead as a philosophical movement. It had come under strong attack even in the philosophy of science. The leading theory of knowledge by this time was one whose foundations lie in the work of Kant and Hegel, or more precisely, in the radicalization of the Hegelian tradition which occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The transformation of Hegelianism led to a distinctive conception both of the world and of human knowledge. The world, or nature, came to be understood in terms of flux, change, or becoming rather than fixity, permanence, or being. Knowledge was now conceived in terms of creation rather than discovery.[45]

For Miller, the most important figure in this radicalization of Hegel's historicism was the great German thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche. However, Miller also points out that a number of other thinkers, some contemporary with Nietzsche and some writing in the decades following his death in 1900, some influenced by him and others not, came to many of the same philosophic conclusions as did Nietzsche. He gives two prominent thinkers of the American pragmatist movement, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, as examples. In England, says Miller, the position was developed by F.C.S. Schiller, R.G. Collingwood, and, in his later years, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Some prominent French thinkers, for example, Henri Bergson, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Marleau-Ponty, also moved in this direction. But it was in

Germany that historicism enjoyed its widest philosophical influence. In addition to Nietzsche, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Oswald Spengler, and Karl Mannheim were influential in spreading the historicist influence. That mode of thinking also profoundly influenced many lesser-known historiographers and social scientists.

Miller notes that there is a difficulty in deciding upon a name for the relativistic theory of knowledge that stands in opposition to positivism. For instance, one might apply the terms "perspectivisim", "subjectivism", "relativism", or "instrumentalism". However, Miller opts for the term "historicism", because he feels that is has come to be the most widely-used appellation for that ascendant theory of knowledge. Miller also refers to the problem of precisely defining "historicism". For instance,, he notes both the Meinecke and Popper/Hayek conceptions that we have already discussed. However, he judges that the term has come to have a "principal meaning" in contemporary academic discourse, at least since the "great debate about historicism in Germany in the early decades of the twentieth century":

> I shall be using the term in an epistemological sense to denote the view that all human knowledge is essentially relative to time and place.[46]

As he analyzes the issues, Professor Miller sees certain logical consequences of holding such a view of the character of human knowing:

> By insisting on the historicity of the human mind, historicism calls into question the very possibility of knowledge that is true or "objective" in the sense of grasping nature as it really is. Whatever "truth" might mean for historicism, it cannot mean the

> congruence in some sense of thoughts and things. If the experience by which we interpret the world and ourselves enters consciousness only after its transformation by presuppositions or categories of thought which are themselves essentially variable and arbitrary, then all claims to absolute knowledge must be regarded as baseless in principle.[47]

The historicist theory of knowledge, then, redounds upon any explanation of human behaviour which purports to have discovered universally valid and applicable laws, principles, or "tendencies" in that behaviour. However, it should also be recognized, and often is not, that such an epistemological position relativizes human knowledge of the non-human, "natural" world as well.[48] As Miller notes, Thomas Kuhn's re-interpretation of the history of natural science is historicist:

> Kuhn, by contrast, describes the evolution of science in much the same way that the historicist describes the historical process, namely, as a mere sequence of epochs, each with its distinctive worldview, no one of which can claim to represent a closer approximation to the truth about the whole than any other.[49]

By interpreting the "progress" of science as a process whereby succeeding "paradigms" continually supplant one another, Kuhn has attempted to overturn the traditional view that natural science progresses cumulatively.[50]

Before concluding with the survey of the various definitions of the concept of historicism, I shall offer one final characterization of that philosophic position which is distinguished by its simplicity and clarity. George Grant paraphrases the historicist position as follows:

> Previous philosophers have taken their contemporaries as if they were man as he always is, and proceeded from their definition of that supposedly unchanging being to make generalizations about the meaning of human life, and even about the whole of which man is a part. But it has become evident that all species, human as much as non-human, can only be understood as continually changing, that is, as having histories. Darwin made this patently clear about the other animals. There are not types of animals that are always on earth; species come to be, are in continual change and pass away. The same is so about ourselves. What is fundamental about all human behaviour (including our understanding of it - itself a behaviour) is its historicity.[51]

We have, then, historicism: a view of the whole which asserts that reality is essentially characterized by flux, change, transition, or becoming, and that human knowing of that reality is also radically temporal. Historicism asserts that there are no universal, objective, non-transitory, permanent categories either of being or of knowing. All human knowledge is perspectival, historical, relative. Thought about thought, or epistemology, consists solely of recognizing the historicity of all thought. Shortly after this theory of knowledge came to prominence in 19th century Europe, historicism broke into two main streams. On the one hand, Hegel and Marx sought to avoid the relativistic consequences of their historicist ontologies by positing the notion that epistemological historical relativity had an endpoint or limit at which one might stand and possess the ability to see the truth about becoming. This view, depending upon which of the two thinkers is being referred to, has been variously called "transcendental", "illuminist", "theoretical", "scientific",

"rational", or "limit" historicism.[52] Nietzsche, on the other hand seems to have posited a "radical" historicism, an historicism which asserts that there is no meaning to the historical process, and no end to becoming. No one has shown the consequences of such a view more clearly than Nietzsche. There might also be a third sort of historicism, a "progressivist" or "cumulative" type, which vacillates between the "limit" historicism of Hegel and Marx on the one hand, and the "absolute" historicism of Nietzsche on the other. We shall consider this speculation in greater detail in a later chapter, with respect to the thought of Collingwood.

NOTES TO PART I

[1]Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1936), p.22.

[2]Eugene Miller, "Positivism, Historicism, and Political Inquiry", A.P.S.R., Vol. 66, (Sept., 1972).

[3]Karl Mannheim, "Historicism", included in Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1952), p.84.

[4]Hans Meyerhoff, Introduction to the Philosophy of History in Our Time: An Anthology (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), p.9. The Meinicke quote is from Die Enstehung des Historismus, 2 vols. (Munich, 1936). The other quotation is from Geoffrey Barraclough, History in A Changing World (Oxford, 1955), p.2, this being an essay which is reprinted in the Meyerhoff Anthology.

[5]Maurice Mandelbaum, "Historicism", Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1972, Vol.4., p.22. Dwight E. Lee and Robert N. Beck, "The Meaning of Historicism", American Historical Review, 1953-54, Vol.59., p.572.

[6]Mandelbaum, "Historicism", p.22. Menger's first published use of Historismus probably occurred in 1883, in a pamphlet entitled Errors of Historicism. He and Gustav Schmoller, a fellow German political economist, apparently carried on a short but acrimonious academic exchange over the appropriatness of deductive vs. inductive methodology in economic theory, into which, naturally enough, the question of the proper use of historical data inserted itself. See Jacob Oser, The Evolution of Economic Thought, 2nd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1970), pp.191-2.

[7]Mandellbaum, "Historicism", p.22.

[8]See Eva Schoper, "Troeltsch, Ernst", Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1972, Vol.8, p.162.

[9]Political philosophy attempts to find a basis for ethics in what can be seen to be true about the universe via the exercize of unaided human reason. Christianity purports to find this basis in divine revelation. Since we shall not be concerned with theology in this essay, our problem will be importantly different than Troeltsch's. However, the fact that both political philosophy and Christian theology argue for an absolute, non-transitory, universal set of ethical precepts constitutes an overwhelmingly important similarity between the two, when set against historicist relativity.

[10]See Werner Stark, "Mannheim, Karl", Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1972, Vol.5, p.151.

[11]Mannheim, "Historicism", p.86.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Mandelbaum, "Historicism", p.23.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Mannheim, "Historicism", p.86.

[16]Ibid., p.89., emphasis added.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., p.87.

[19]See Sidney B. Fay, "Meinecke, Friedrich", Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1972, Vol.5, p.259.

[20]Mandelbaum, "Historicism", p.23.

[21]See H.S. Harris, "Croce, Benedetto", Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1972, Vol.2, p.263.

[22]I infer this on the basis of three observations: 1) In Collingwood's progressivist history of historiography, The Idea of History (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), Croce gets a more extended treatment than any other thinker; 2) For Collingwood, the development of scientific history culminates with Croce; 3) Collingwood's views on history, science, philosophy, and the meaning of historical science seem to bear more than passing resemblance to those of Croce.

[23]See Lee and Beck, "The Meaning of Historicism", p.572.

[24]Benedetto Croce, History as the Story of Liberty (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1941), p.65.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Mandelbaum, "Historicism", p.23.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Collingwood, The Idea of History, p.193. Lee and Beck also express the judgement that Croce, Meinecke, and Collingwood share a certain "humanistic" conception of historicism. See "The Meaning of Historicism", p.575.

[30] Croce, History as the Story of Liberty, p.83.

[31] Ibid., p.84.

[32] Karl Popper, The Poverty of Historicism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p.3.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Others have expressed the judgement that Popper's employment of "historicism" with an emphasis on historical prediction is inconsistent with accepted usage of the term. See, for instance, Lee and Beck, p.577, and Hans Meyerhoff, The Philosophy of History in Our Time (New York, 1959), p.299. Georg G. Iggers also emphasizes that Popper's usage of "historicism" is in "distinct contrast" to accepted usages. See "The Dissolution of German Historicism", in Richard Herr and Harold T. Parker, eds., Ideas In History (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1965), p.290.

[35] See Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, Reading Capital (London: N.L.B., 1977), esp. ch. 5. See also Nicos Poulantzas, Political Power and Social Classes (London: N.L.B., 1973), esp. pp. 195-225. Some of the work of Ralph Miliband is also relevant, and the literature of the so-called "Poulantzas - Miliband Debate" is helpful. See, for instance, New Left Review, No's. 58 and 59, and Ernesto Laclau, "The Specificity of the Political: The Poulantzas - Miliband Debate," Economy and Society, Vol. 4, 1975.

[36] Morris L. Cohen, The Meaning of Human History, (La Salle, Ill., 1947), p.16. Quoted in Lee and Beck, "The Meaning of Historicism", p.569.

[37] Lee and Beck, ibid.

[38] Dagobert D. Runes, Dictionary of Philosophy (New York, 1942). Quoted in Lee and Beck, p.568.

[39]Friedrich Engel-Janosi, The Growth of German Historicism, The John Hopkins Univ. Studies in History and Political Science, Series 62, No. 2 (1944), p.13. Quoted in Lee and Beck, p.569.

[40]Louis Gottschalk, "The Historian and the Historical Document," Social Science Research Bulletin, No. 53 (1945), p.25. Quoted in Lee and Beck, p.573. Gottschalk is apparently citing Karl Mannheim.

[41]Lee and Beck, p.577.

[42]See W.H. Dray, "Spengler, Oswald", Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1972, Vol.7, p.527.

[43]Leo Strauss, "The Three Waves of Modernity", included in Hilail Gilden, ed., Political Philosophy: Six Essays by Leo Strauss (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co. Ltd., 1975), p.81.

[44]Ibid., p.82.

[45]Miller, "Positivism, Historicism, and Political Inquiry", p.796.

[46]Ibid., p.797.

[47]Ibid., p.800.

[48]I have enclosed the word "natural" in quotation marks for a definite reason. I shall not speak of man as if he were something "outside of" the realm of nature. To do so would be to endorse a conception of man and the universe he inhabits which I find myself unable to subscribe to.

[49]Miller, "Positivism, Historicism, and Political Inquiry", p.804.

[50]Kuhn's views are contained, most importantly, in his monograph entitled, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).

[51]George Grant, Time as History (C.B.C. Massey Lectures, 1969), p.26.

[52]It should be noted that Marxists would not, I think, accept either the "trancendental" or "illuminist" labels for their philosophy. I intend those labels to refer primarily to Hegelian historicism.

PART II: HISTORICISM AS A CHALLENGE TO POLITICAL THOUGHT

In PART I of this essay, my objectives were fairly modest. I hoped therein to convincingly characterize the term "historicism" as being one which contemporary scholars use to identify a certain, specific epistemological position. I pointed to the fact that there has been and still is some disagreement over the precise usage of the term, but went on to observe that one can also identify a more-or-less agreed upon current usage of "historicism". I at least implied that the particular meaning that Leo Strauss and his students and followers give to the term is congruent with this agreed upon usage,[1] and that it was this conception of "historicism" that I would be utilizing in the balance of this essay.

The reader, having followed the essay thus far, may be thinking that I have suggested more than I have actually asserted, and this is correct: I have implied more than I have actually argued for to this point. I have hoped to plant the suspicion in the reader's mind that "historicism" is a name for an important and powerful genre of thought. I believe that historicism is important and powerful both by virtue of its effect on the thinking of those who practice what are called the social sciences, and, perhaps relatedly, by virtue of its effect on the way that all of us, in the West at least, have come to view the world and our place in it. These are large claims indeed, necessarily speculative, and correspondingly difficult to prove. For the

purposes of this thesis, I shall make no attempt either to do much more than I have already by way of showing that historicism has considerable influence on contemporary academic discourse, or to show how the epistemological/ontological position that is our concern here affects our politics, and thereby, the whole of our life. Nor shall I accept the challenge, at least not directly, of proving that philosophy shapes politics. And I shall not canvass either contemporary academic or extra-academic discourse to show how attitudes which derive from historicist philosophy have actually influenced our thinking and our behaviour. That this could be plausibly shown I have little doubt, and there is certainly an important place for this kind of work in the study of politics, but it is not my concern here. I shall confine myself to the theoretical aspects of historicism, and set aside the sociological question of its actual influence in our lives. Let me also make explicit at the outset another arguable judgement of mine - and I shall say more about this presently - I do not think that metaphysics is divorced from politics; rather, I am convinced that quite the opposite is the case. While foregoing any detailed attempt to support that conviction via observation of actual political life, as it is now or as it has been, I shall try to do what may be done by way of supporting it with argument at the theoretical level.

The major implication of PART I, and it is the one that I wish to expand upon and attempt to defend in this essay, is the implication, made explicit in the quotation from Strauss's

"The Three Waves of Modernity", that historicism fundamentally challenges the possibility of political philosophy, and that it would seem, therefore, that we have reason to suspect that historicism has contributed in no small way to modern man's observable doubt that he can know good from bad, or right from wrong - in a word, that he can know how to live well. Strauss tells us that this lack of faith in the possibility of achieving a reasoned account of the purpose of human life, or the moral ambivalence of our time, is "the crisis of modernity."[2] Without meaning to imply that I have an equal title to this judgement, I would admit I too have increasingly come to suspect that relativism, in its many guises, has had a grievious affect on our thinking and on our life. And, following Strauss, I have come to equate historicism with ethical relativism, and will try to show how this is so in what follows.

For those of us who have been educated in what the western intellectual tradition has come to in recent times, it is not at all difficult to accept an historicist view of reality, and of our place in that reality. A great many of us find the thought of, say, Marx, or Nietzsche, to be very persuasive. Indeed, what <u>is</u> difficult for us is to consider that there could be any other view of reality, once one has seen historicist philosophy fully developed in the works of those best able to present it to us. One of the primary purposes of this part of the thesis will be to go some way towards understanding why historicism is so persuasive to us. Here, and in PART III as well, we shall want to

ask what it is about that philosophic position that would persuade a reflective man that it is the true account of the whole of things, or the true first philosophy.

That having been said however, I shall not make it my business in this thesis to defend historicism to any great extent, being as I am rather more interested in speculating on whether or not one may find reasons for doubting this modern current of philosophy. Perhaps it is merely a lack of philosophic courage that causes one to recoil from Nietzsche's terrible assertion that the universe, and man's existance in it, has absolutely no meaning. And perhaps Max Weber, following Nietzsche, was right to assert that we must so regard the universe, and harden our spirit to the task of facing up manfully to the fact that reason cannot answer the "only question important to us: 'What shall we do and how shall we live?'[3]" But this has been the central question of political philosophy for well over two thousand years. If it cannot be answered, then political philosophy as traditionally understood is a fruitless enterprise. Croce, speaking of all philosophic thought in general, but clearly meaning as well to indict political philosophy in particular, set out clearly the consequences for philosophic thought that inhere in the historicist metaphysic:

> But historical thought has played a nasty trick on this respectable transcendental philosophy, as upon its twin, transcendental religion, of which the former is the reasoned or theological form; the trick of turning it into history, by interpreting all its concepts, doctrines,

> disputes, and even its disconsolate skeptical renunciations, as historical facts and affirmations, which arose out of cetain requirements, that were thus partly satisfied and partly unsatisfied. In this way historical thought did due justice to the age-long dominance of transcendental philosophy (a domination which was also a service to human society) and marked its end with a decent obituary.[4]

As the reader may recall from my previous discussion, Croce did not think that the collapse of philosophy into history necessarily made all human experience meaningless, for he thought that history itself could be made to provide guidance for man's thinking and doing. However, I shall examine this notion in what follows, and hope to show that historicism must always be relativistic, and that no truth can be had from history, once one has posited the radical temporality of all things, including, especially, all forms of human knowing. If all things truly are transitory, and there is no realm of eternal being accessible for contemplation by men, then we must follow what seems to be Nietzsche's advice and face up to that fact in as virile a manner as our spirits allow. But before summoning the courage to confront such an abyss, perhaps we might question the ontological and epistemological premises of radical historicism, to see whether or not one may doubt its being the true metaphysical account of things. In so doing, we may be moved to consider seriously, without prejudice, the older philosophic alternatives that historicism would seem to have discredited.

In this part of the thesis, then, I shall try to do three things. I shall begin by attempting to characterize the enterprise of political philosophy. Having thus prepared the way, I shall, in the latter half of PART II, render an exegisis of Leo Strauss's account of the philosophic bases for the historicist conviction, and of his attempt to show how historicism's challenge to the possibility of traditional political philosophy is unsuccessful. I shall do all of this by way of preparing for PART III, in which I shall examine a particular sort of historicism, the progressivist philosophy of R.G. Collingwood, again with an eye to examining the validity of historicism's implicit and explicit attempt to discredit the philosophic alternatives that preceeded it.

On the Enterprise of Political Philosophy

> It is only when the Here and Now ceases to be the center of reference that a philosophic or scientific approach to politics can emerge.
>
> Leo Strauss[5]

In order to understand the challenge that historicism poses for political philosophy, we must take up what is for contemporary scholars a profound problem - explicating what political philosophy properly is.[6]

Strauss begins his major lecture/essay on that definitional problem with the following remarks:

> It is a great honor, and at the same time a challenge to accept a task of particular difficulty, to be asked to speak about political philosophy in Jerusalem.[7]

Professor Stauss presumably means here that the task of

speaking about political philosophy is particularly challenging in Jerusalem, for he recognizes the conflict between political philosophy, which relies upon the exercize of unaided human reason at all points, and religion, which presumes some faith in divine revelation. As a close student of our philosophic tradition, Strauss could hardly be unaware of the ramifications, both philosophic and political, of the confrontation between philosophy and religion, or of the confrontation between Athens and Jerusalem, as Strauss elsewhere characterizes it. But in alluding to the "particular difficulty" of speaking about political philosophy, Strauss may have something more in mind as well.

In using the term "political philosophy" as a designation for a particular branch of inquiry, we refer to two things. The word "political" refers to the subject of that domain of discourse, and the word "philosophy" refers to the manner of treatment of that subject matter.

The word philosophy, whatever else it means, refers to rational inquiry, a certain way of searching for knowledge of reality.[8] Moreover, philosophy has traditionally involved speculation; it is "theoretical". The word "theory" is scarcely easier to understand than is "philosophy", but both refer to the attempt to achieve some sort of overall understanding, some <u>explanation</u> of things. Thus, "philosophizing" (or "theorizing") refers to the attempt to give a general, often necessarily a somewhat speculative, but nonetheless reasoned account of things. Philosophy

searches for a synoptic vision of the whole of reality, an understanding of things which is more than the sum of its parts, in that it includes (at least) insight into the ordering principles. Thus, philosophy is both radical and comprehensive. It is radical in the original sense of the term, that is, that it attempts to go to the root of things, and it is comprehensive in its intention to understand all things. Men necessarily have beliefs about the whole of things, and philosophy has for its purpose the clarification and rectification of those views. Professor Strauss, speaking to the problem of defining philosophy, says:

> Philosophy, as quest for wisdom, is quest for universal knowledge, for knowledge of the whole. The quest would not be necessary if such knowledge were immediately available. The absence of knowledge of the whole does not mean, however, that men do not have thoughts about the whole: philosophy is necessarily preceeded by opinions about the whole. It is, therefore, the attempt to replace opinions about the whole by knowledge of the whole.[9]

I shall return to the theme of philosophy's attempt to comprehend the whole in a moment, but first, we may say something more about the significance and meaning of the term "political" for political philosophy. Strauss is again worth quoting at some length:

> All political action aims at either <u>preservation</u> or <u>change</u>. When desiring to preserve, we wish to prevent a change to the worse; when desiring to change, we wish to bring about something better. All political action is then guided by some thought of better and worse. But thought of better or worse implies thought of the good. The awareness of the good which

If Strauss's observation that all political action aims at preservation or change seems exhaustive and incontrovertible, then his assertion that a political science or philosophy worthy of the name must concern itself with the ends of political action, or the good for man, seems undeniable. Invoking the authority of Aristotle again, one may assert that the fact that Aristotle chooses to begin his major treatice on ethics with a discussion of what the role of a science of politics must be in men's lives speaks for the idea that ethics and politics are inextricably connected. If we are not impressed by the majesty of Aristotle regarding this matter, we should be convinced by his argument. He begins:

> Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and purusit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim.[12]

He goes on to emphasize the fact that there are many actions, arts, and sciences, and that their ends are also many; for instance, "the end of the medical art is health, that of ship-building a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of economics wealth."[13] Where such arts fall under, or are subordinate to, a higher or more comprehensive art, says Aristotle;

> ...as bridle-making and the other arts concerned with the equipment of horses fall under the art of riding, and this and every military action under strategy, in the same way other arts fall under yet others - in all of these the ends of the master arts are to be preferred to all the subordinate ends; for it is for the sake of the former that the latter are pursued.[14]

Thus, if there is some end of things that men do, and if it is desired for its own sake (all other, lesser ends being desired for the sake of that final end) and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else, in which event our choosing would be an "empty and vain", infinite process, "clearly this must be the good and the chief good." As Aristotle goes on to point out, surely we would have to consider knowledge of this chief or final good to be of great significance for our lives; and the science or capacity which has it as its object to be the most authoritative science or art of all:

> And politics appears to be of this nature; for it is this that ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state, and which each class of citizens should learn and up to what point they should learn them; and we see even the most highly esteemed of capacities to fall under this, eg. strategy, economics, rhetoric; now, since politics uses the rest of the sciences, and since, again, it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science must be the good for man.[15]

Thus, for Aristotle, and for us, the political art must be considered to be truly the master art, for it is the art which has as its purpose the attainment of the ultimate end of human action, the end to which all other ends are subordinate, and that end is the good for man. Reflection on this art, ie., political science or political philosophy, must then be considered to be the master art, the highest of the practical arts.

If we must concede Strauss's assertion that all political

action aims at either preservation or change, and that this implies thought of better and worse, or thought of the good, then we must also insist that reflection upon political action is a "practical" concern, in that it has practical consequences. (Theoretical inquiry into the subject of politics, whenever it is done in public, is necessarily prescriptive, whether directly or indirectly.) Politics reveals itself in the ruler/ruled distinction that is found always and everywhere in human societies, but political science cannot be presumed to concern itself exclusively with questions of means of rule, or with power, or with realpolitik, to use a modern term. Political science must also address the problem of just exercize of power, or good ruling. Political science, or political philosophy, is misunderstood when it is thought of as being a purely "theoretical" pursuit, a body of speculation which has no bearing on the way that men really do live. Similarly, political science would be truncated were it to confine itself to mere description of political affairs, past or present. Political philosophy begins with observation of men as they actually do live, but it seeks to ascend to knowledge of how men ought to live. It seeks to achieve a standard or standards by which to judge actual politics: it implicitly seeks that in light of which we may justly praise and blame. At the centre of its vision, then, political philosophy has a concern with ruling and being ruled, and with the means by which the good rule is to be implemented. Political philosophy is concerned with power.

But it also concerns itself with the end of ruling, or with justice. It is significant indeed that the first great written work of political philosophy, Plato's Republic, has as its unifying concern the problem of how to conjoin wisdom and power, symbolized in that seemingly paradoxical figure of the philosopher-king.

Thus, political philosophy ascends unto the highest realms of theory, and returns to the realm of everyday, practical life, to the things that are familiar to all men. George Grant sums up the connection between theory and practice as follows:

> Theory always seems so unspecific to those who do not realize its constitutive power. But to be a philosopher is to know its power. Only those will be interested in philosophy who realize that as we sow in theory so will we reap in action.[16]

And again:

> Political philosophy is not some pleasant cultural game reserved for those too impotent for practice. It is concerned with judgements about goodness. As these judgements are apprehended and acted upon by practical men, they become the unfolding of fate.[17]

Having amplified the meaning of the term "political" vis-a-vis political philosophy, and having noted the natural tie between political thoery and political practice, we need to return again to consideration of the meaning of "philosophy". Recall Professor Strauss's assertion that "philosophy, as quest for wisdom, is quest for universal knowledge, for knowledge of the whole." and that this quest for knowledge of the whole begins with

awareness of men's opinions about the whole. Professor Strauss clarifies what he means by "the whole" as follows:

> Quest for knowledge of "all things" means quest for knowledge of God, the world, and man - or rather quest for knowledge of the natures of all things: the natures in their totality are "the whole".[18]

He goes on to speak of the connection between philosophy proper and specifically political philosophy:

> Of philosophy thus understood, political philosoophy is a branch. Political philosophy will then be the attempt to replace opinion about the nature of political things by knowledge of the nature of political things.[19]

We should see, then, that if philosophy proper is the quest for knowledge of the natures of the entirety of things, political philosophy is the quest for knowledge of the nature of political things. And further, since man is that creature among the universal constellation of things (or at least, those that we are familiar with) for whom politics, in the fullest sense of the term, is a relevant concern, political philosophy is centrally concerned with what may be known about the nature of man. The "political" things are the human things; therefore, one has to know something about the essence of "humanness" - of humanity - in order to understand politics. It is not an exaggeration to say that the very core of the enterprise of political philosophy is the quest for knowledge of the nature of man, and one can see, I think, that the great thinkers of our tradition of political thought agree on this central imperative. I shall say more about the

centrality of the question of man's nature below, but first I must say something more about the theoretical connection between philosophy proper and political philosophy.

Following upon the words of Grant quoted previously, we should see that, properly understood, the study of political things has no real boundary, no limit to the things that it must seek to encompass. Joseph Cropsey has spoken of this realization as follows:

> Political philosophy is very comprehensive, for it has in its purview all the human things and all the things that touch humanity. It evidently cannot have all things at the center of its field of vision, but it could not claim to stand for man's knowledge of himself as a social being if, to the end, it averted its view from what, as human, we do and suffer. The truth of all things is one by the measure that shows all things to be, not one, but linked or articulated as a whole.[20]

Henry M. Magid puts the relationship between philosophy and political philosophy in similar terms:

> Traditionally, philosophical studies have been distinguished from other studies, among other ways, by their search for comprehensiveness. The philosopher cannot say that this question or that question is outside his field and belongs in someone else's field. Philosophy seeks for comprehensive knowledge of the whole. Political philosophy, therefore, seeks for comprehensive knowledge of political matters.[21]
>
> Just as early philosophers conceived of philosophy as the search for the truth about the whole, so early political philosophers understood political philosophy as the search for the truth about

> political things with the assumption that the truth about political things had to be understood as in some sense a part of the truth about the whole.[22]

Both Cropsey and Magid clearly imply that political philosophy is a part of philosophy proper, and thereby subordinate to it. Thus, although political philosophy has at the center of its vision the human things, it ultimately leads to more fundamental, all-encompassing matters, for to have knowledge regarding the human things requires knowledge of all the things that touch or affect humanity. Political philosophy must involve speculation upon what has recently been called ontological matters: it must search for knowledge of what it is to be in the universe of things in general, so that one may know what it is to be human in particular. Political philosophy must have an understanding of Nature in general in order to understand human nature. It must also seek to know what it is to know, (as opposed to merely opine) and how one is to know, to attempt to have knowledge about knowledge, or in other words, to give some account of what modern teachers of philosophy call "epistemology". Political philosophy, as I have already argued, consists of the attempt to act rightly, or, what is the same thing, to be able to justify one's actions. Alexandre Kojève, a distinguished student and interpreter of Hegel and Marx, put the comprehensive nature of philosophy and the connection between political philosophy and philosophy proper as follows:

> All philosophers are in agreement about the definition of the Wise Man. Moreover, it is very simple and can be stated in a single sentence: that man is Wise who is capable of answering in a comprehensible or satisfactory manner all questions that can be asked him concerning his acts, and capable of answering in such fashion that the entirety of his answers forms a coherent discourse. Or else, what amounts to the same thing: that man is Wise who is fully and perfectly self-conscious.[23]

Kojève goes on to amplify this general pronouncement on the nature of the philosophic enterprise in more concrete detail:

> It is the case that one can ask any question at all about any of our acts - that of washing, for example, or of paying taxes - with the result that, after several answers that call forth each time a new "why", one comes to the problems of the relationship between the soul and the body, between the individual and the State; to questions relating to the finite and the infinite, to death and immortality, to God and the World; and finally to the problem of knowledge itself, of this coherent and meaningful language that permits us to ask questions and to answer them. In short, by proceeding, so to speak, in the vertical plane, one will quickly come face to face with the entire body of the so-called philosophical or "metaphysical" questions.[24]

Despite, however, the necessary connection between political philosophy and philosophy proper, or between the heavenly things and the human things, political philosophy does not lose itself in contemplation of the problems of metaphysics. Strauss, speaking about the philosophy of Socrates, articulates this essential qualification thusly:

> Socrates, then, viewed man in the light of the mysterious character of the whole. He held therefore that we are more familiar with the situation of man as man than with the ultimate causes of that situation.[25]

There is at least one aspect of the situation of man that all competent adults are familiar with, and that is the fact that there are and always have been, so far as we know, many different regimes, or different systems of social organization, and that men disagree over the question of which regime is best. Political philosophy begins from this elementary observation that men have differing opinions as to what the best regime is, and proceeds by attempting to know what the best regime is simply. Political philosophy is most readily recognizable as the pursuit of knowledge regarding the best regime.

Observation shows us that virtually all human societies have laws. These laws may be more or less well-articulated and enforced, and they may be articulated and enforced in widely differing ways, but few observers of human societies would be prepared to deny that law is a characteristic of human society. By identifying and describing the laws extant in any society, we identify that society's character, and we can readily describe what it is that differentiates one society from another. But we must, it seems, also account for what it is about a given societal type that gives its laws their particular character, and this, it turns out, is that society's regime: the regime is more fundamental than the laws. Strauss makes this point in "What Is

Political Philosophy", speaking with particular reference to Plato's Laws:

> If the originator of the Cretan Laws, or any other laws, is not a god, the cause of the laws must be human beings, the human legislator. There is a variety of types of human legislators: the legislator has a different character in a democracy, in an oligarchy, in a monarchy. The legislator is the governing body, and the character of the governing body depends on the whole social and political order, the politeia, the regime. The cause of the laws is the regime. Therefore the guiding theme of political philosophy is the regime rather than the laws. Regime becomes the guiding theme of political thought when the derivative or questionable character of laws has been realized.[26]

> Regime is the order, the form, which gives society its character. Regime is therefore a specific manner of life. Regime is the form of life as living together, the manner of living of society and in society, since this manner depends decisively on the predominance of human beings of a certain type, on the manifest domination of society by human beings of a certain type. Regime means that whole, which we today are in the habit of viewing primarily in a fragmentized form: regime means simultaneously the form of life of a society, its style of life, its moral taste, form of society, form of state, form of government, spirit of laws.[27]

Thus, for Strauss, "the theme of political philosophy is the City and Man."[28] In speaking of the theme of political philosophy as being the City and Man, Strauss refers to the fact that, at its origins in ancient Greece, and for a long time thereafter, political philosophy considered the city-state to be the natural political unit for man. Whether or not this is true

remains an open question, but the fact that we now live in mass societies, and our unit of political organization is the nation-state (so that our political philosophy must speak with an awareness of that fact) does not change the fundamental truth that the regime under which we live touches every aspect of our life.

The Permanent Questions of Political Philosophy

Having thus far pursued a course of attempting to characterize political philosophy more or less formally - having attempted to give a rational account of the direction that any philosophic study of politics should take - to the point at which I have, I hope, shown the importance to that enterprise of the interconnected questions of the essential nature of man and of the best political regime for man to live under, I could perhaps be expected to move to an historical/literary consideration of our written tradition of political thought. That is, I could seek agreement with the foregoing characterization of political philosophy in the writings of the recognized masters of that genre of thought. I could attempt to show, for instance, the sense in which thinkers as seemingly diverse as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and J.S. Mill, as well as others, can all be said to fit into the class, "political philosopher", that I have been seeking to define. I shall not adopt this strategy for two reasons. Firstly: In order to present such an historical survey of the tradition, one would have to come to grips with a number of rather large problems of interpretation connected with the written works of that tradition, and

that whole task would be a much more involved and lengthy one than what one could plausibly be prepared to undertake in a short work. Indeed, it will be obvious to any student of our tradition of political thought that such a task would necessitate an entire, lengthy study in and of itself. Secondly, and perhaps more directly to the point, even supposing one could hope to do some sort of justice to the tradition in a brief exposition, the adoption of such a task would, I feel, unnecessarily divert attention from the question of historicism's challenge to political philosophy, the central problem that I want to maintain as my focus in this essay.

If one undertook such a survey, one would have to recognize that certain deep cleavages exist between political philosophers individually, and especially between the ancients and the moderns, regarding the nature of their enterprise. However, it could also be shown that the great political philosophers are in fundamental agreement about the direction that a philosophic study of politics must take. (I am persuaded that the body of Leo Strauss's lifetime of written work shows satisfactorily that this agreement between political philosophers exists, so that we can with justification speak of a <u>tradition</u> of political philosophy.) Specifically, one could show that there are a number of permanently relevant <u>questions</u> which the masters of the tradition have all felt it was necessary to address in order to give a reasoned account of man's political life, or man's life simply, or "the human condition", as

it is sometimes referred to. I emphasize the matter of the permanent questions of political philosophy here because I mean to focus on it in the consideration of R.G. Collingwood's historicism that I undertake in Part III of this essay. At any rate, the following ten questions seem to me to be characteristic of the tradition of political philosophy (and a case can be made for other, perhaps derivative questions as well); What is the best regime, simply? What is the best practical regime under any given circumstance? What is the nature of justice? What is the proper role of private property? What is the nature and extent of political obligation? What is the correct relationship between politics and religion? What is the correct relationship between politics and science? What is the correct relationship between politics and art? When is recourse to war appropriate? What character of military organization is best?

Having rendered the foregoing list of political questions, I shall break off my consideration of the nature of political philosophy, and return to express consideration of the problem of historicism.

Leo Strauss on the Problem of Historicism

Strauss begins Chapter I of Natural Right and History with the following assertion:

> The attack on natural right in the name of history takes, in most cases, the following form: natural right claims to be a right that is discernable by human reason and is universally acknowledged; but history (including anthropology) teaches us that

> no such right exists; instead of the supposed uniformity, we find an indefinite variety of notions of right or justice. Or, in othe words, there cannot be natural right if there are no immutable principles of justice, but history shows us that all principles of justice are mutable.[29]

Thus, according to historicists, man's experience of his own history ought to show him that there are no principles of right, or answers to the question "how should we live?", that have not been denied by some or many at some point in the past. Strauss argues that "one cannot undersand the meaning of the attack on natural right in the name of history before one has realized the utter irrelevance of this argument."[30] It is irrelevant to assert that some men have at one time or another denied every principle of right, or good, or justice, because "consent of all mankind" is in no way required by a principle of right. It has always been assumed by the great teachers of natural right that "precisely if natural right is rational", that is, if it is characteristic of an ordered cosmos of which man is a part, then "its discovery presupposes the cultivation of reason, and therefore natural right will not be known universally."[31] Not all men cultivate reason in any active manner, not does it seem that all men are by nature capable of the sort of reasoning that is required for political philosophy. At any rate, by way of expanding upon Strauss's point somewhat, I would assert that common sense and everyday experience should show us that it is indeed a difficult task to reason about how best one should live one's life, and that the

question is made all the more complex by the inescapable fact that one must live in a community with other men, each with his own aspirations and ideas of how human life ought to be lived. Thus, one need not be surprised that every proposed principle of right or of justice has been denied by many men, both in word and deed, and one need not presume that denial of a principle proves that it is wrong. Whether or not denial of a principle is justified or reasonable may only be decided by reason: the question of right and wrong is not to be settled by any mere canvass of opinion, no matter how thorough and/or expansive, and regardless of whatever standpoint of history that canvass is undertaken from. Strauss repeatedly makes the point in his writings that reflective men have always known that "different notions of justice obtain at different times and in different nations.", and that "it is absurd to claim that the discovery of a still greater number of such notions by modern students has in any way affected the fundamental issue."[32]

Indeed, says Strauss, aquaintance with the sort of disagreement over principles of justice that prevails among men is the very precondition for the emergence of political philosophy, or of the attempt to adjudicate among opinions. "Realization of the variety of notions of right is the incentive for the quest for natural right."[33]

But, says Strauss, it would seem that the case for historicism cannot be said to rest exclusively on the observation that men disagree about justice. Rather more importantly, historicism must have its roots in a "philosophic critique of the possibility, or the

knowability, of natural right - a critique somehow connected with 'history' ".[34] Thus, Strauss seems to tell us that historicism finds its philosophic support as much in a fundamental epistemological critique of political philosophy as it does in observation of the manifold variety of history.

Before going on to outline the form that that critique of political philosophy takes, Strauss feels that he must distinguish a very old philosophic view of natural right that he calls "conventionalism" from "the historical sense" or "the historical consciousness" that would seem to be characteristic of much nineteenth and twentieth-century thought. Conventionalism differs from historicism on at least one key assumption: conventionalism accepts the philosophic distinction between nature and convention, while historicism does not:

> Conventionalism presupposed that the distinction between nature and convention is the most fundamental of all distinctions. It implied that nature is of incomparably higher dignity than convention or the fiat of society, or that nature is the norm. The thesis that right and justice are conventional meant that right and justice have no basis in nature, that they are ultimately against nature, and that they have their ground in arbitrary decisions, explicit or implicit, of communities: they have no basis but some kind of agreement, and agreement may produce peace but it cannot produce truth.[35]

Conventionalism is represented in Plato's dialogues. Perhaps the most well-known example is the discussion that takes place between Socrates and Thrasymachus in Plato's Republic. Thrasymachus

expresses a conventionalist account of justice: justice is simply whatever the ruling element of the political community says it is, and this element will always give an account of the principles of justice that is advantageous to it. But Thrasymachus, conventionalist though he is, is not an historicist. He couldn't be, for Plato is writing long before the discovery of scientific history, and therefore, according to historicism's own account of intellectual history, Plato could not have possessed the insight that all thought is historically determined. (One may also, of course, think of Thomas Hobbes as a more modern example of the conventionalist persuasion vis-a-vis justice, and similarly point out that Hobbes is no historicist, accepting as he does the distinction between nature and convention.)

Historicists, on the other hand, says Strauss, take one of two positions. In the first case, "they conceive of man and his works, his varying notions of justice included, as equally natural as all other real things." Strauss is not as explicit as he might have been about what he means by this statement. I think he is referring to the sort of theoretical historicism represented, say, by Marx, where man's thoughts about justice, among other things, are ultimately to be undertood "naturalistically", i.e., as evolving according to certain laws of development, these laws being determined for man by virtue of his "material", and therefore, "natural", existence. In the second case, historicists "assert a basic dualism

between the realm of nature and the realm of freedom or history."[36] This assumption carries with it the implication that man's works, or the realm of human creativity, is exalted far above the realm of nature. Nature is law-governed; humanity is radically free, undetermined. Such historicism does not see men's notions of justice as being "arbitrary"; rather, notions of justice possess a certain dignity. They are acts of free choice, of creativity. Justice is not merely to be suffered for the sake of "political expediency", as on the conventionalist view, but is, rather, a work of art. Justice is to be defined by those best able to define it creatively, and then to be joyfully embraced by all. Historicists who accept this view of justice, in contradistinction to conventionalists, "insist on the fundamental difference between freedom and arbitrariness." We see how there would seem to be no dignity in "arbitrariness", in mere quixotic behavior. "Free choice", however, or free creativity, may be thought by some to preserve human dignity in the face of the abyss. Thus, perhaps historicists are interested in tracing notions of right and wrong to free choice, and in according such acts of creativity the praise that they might be seen to deserve.

Although Strauss does not, at this point, choose to ask the question that follows from his exposition of historicism's apparent wish to distinguish "freedom" from "arbitrariness", one might well ask how "freedom" is to be distinguished from "arbitrariness" on the historicist account of things. What makes one man's act "free" and the other man's arbitrary"? And furthermore, what meaning

would the word "dignity" have, on the basis of the historicist metaphysic?

What, then, is the significance of this difference between conventionalism, as defined in ancient thought, and historicism, as defined in the thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? Conventionalism, as represented in ancient philosophy, even though quite different from the position taken by, say, Plato, agrees with its classical opponents on at least one central point; it admits that the distinction between nature and convention is fundamental. For Strauss, as for the classical philosophers, this distinction is implied in the very idea of philosophy. Philosophy consists of the attempt to rise from belief in public dogma, or conventional opinion, or the cave, or Weltanschauung, to possession of the truth. Public dogma is a necessary component of human life, for it provides men with a common view of the whole, or of the eternal order of things, and with principles of living based thereon. But truly reflective men are apt to find publicly disseminated dogma an inadequate account of the whole; dogma can be seen to exhibit certain lacunae, certain logical inconsistencies, and to lack any convincing account of its own validity. Thus, according to Strauss, "any inadequate view of the eternal order is, from the point of view of the eternal order, accidental or arbitrary; it owes its validity not to its intrinsic truth but to social fiat or convention." Conventionalism, then, rests upon the fundamental premise of philosophy - that popular opinion must be presumed to be an

inadequate account of the whole, and that profound thought is defined by an attempt to grasp the eternal truth by which opinion may be judged. Historicism denies that there is any realm of eternal truth lying behind, or rather, above, conventional, socially determined thought. Making use of Plato's cave metaphor, Strauss summarizes as follows:

> According to [historicists], all human thought is historical and hence unable ever to grasp anything eternal. Whereas, according to the ancients, philosophizing means toleave the cave, according to our contemporaries all philosophizing essentially belongs to a "historical world", "culture", "civilization", "Weltanschuung", that is, to what Plato had called the cave.[38]

It is obviously implicit in what has been said so far that Strauss thinks that without possibility of appeal to an eternal, natural order of things, there can be no objective truth. He is sure that historicism is relativistic, in that it confines all human thought to the variable realm of mere opinion. One should also reiterate at this point that most historicists do not believe that their ontological/epistemological position necessarily and completely relativizes all human thought. Rather, historicists believe that a proper understanding of the historical character of things reveals truth about the universe, and about man's place in it. I believe it can be shown, however, that Strauss is correct in his judgement that historicism is necessarily relativisic.

Having explained the difference between conventionalism and historicism, Strauss provides some plausible speculation on the actual historical process whereby the historicist critique of the possibility

of natural right (or of political philosophy per se) became an overall critique of human thought as such. Strauss judges that historicism first appeared in political philosophy, as a reaction to the French Revolution. The founders of the historical school, says Strauss:

> ...seemed to have realized somehow that the acceptance of any universal or abstract principles has necessarily a revolutionary, disturbing, unsettling effect as far as thought is concerned and that this effect is wholly independent of whether the principles in questin sanction, generally speaking, a conservative or a revolutionary course of action. For the recognition of universal principles forces men to judge the established order, or what is actual here and now, in the light of the natural or rational order; and what is actual here and now is more likely than not to fall short of the universal and unchangeable norm. The recognition of universal principles thus tends to prevent men from wholeheartedly identifying themselves with, or accepting, the social order that fate has allotted to them. It tends to alienate them from their place on the earth. It tends to make them strangers, and even strangers on the earth.[39]

Thus, the "eminent conservatives who founded the historical school" began by denying transcendental natural rights. By so doing, historicism manifested itself as a form of radical, "this-worldliness"; it sought to accustom men to their here and now historical circumstances, and to diffuse men's urges to judge and change those circumstances. Historicism, according to Strauss, entailed a belief "that, by understanding their past, their heritage, their historical situation, men could arrive at principles that would be as objective as those of the older, prehistoricist political philosophy

had claimed to be"[40], and that furthermore, these historical principles would possess the virtue of being "concrete", of being fitted to each particular age or nation, and of being relevant in the fullest sense.

Strauss continues his exposition of the history of historicism by pointing out that the attempt to find concrete, particular ethical principles led historicists to assign a much greater importance to historical studies than they had previously enjoyed. In this "infant" stage of historicism, as Strauss calls it, "the historicist school assumed that nations or ethnic groups are natural units, or it assumed the existence of general laws of historical evolution, or it combined both assumptions."[41] Thus, by virtue of the search for folk minds, or the "Spirit" of each Age, and/or the search for supposed laws of history, "historicism now appeared as a particular form of positivism". It agreed that theology and metaphysics had been superceeded by positive science, or the search for the truth about reality via the methodology of the empirical sciences, but historicists also realized that the history of man could not be studied via strict adherence to the procedures of the natural sciences. By now, the problems of studying man according to the canons of positivism are familiar. For instance (and as we shall see in considering R.G. Collingwood's historicism), it is obvious that one cannot study human behavior without admitting teleological causation into one's theorizing, in as much as man behaves purposefully. Moreover, one may not perform many kinds of controlled experiments

on human beings, whether alone or in groups, especially such as would bear on the largest questions. The subject(s) is/are usually resistant to this sort of thing, and in any case, there are commonly recognized ethical constraints upon such forms of study. And if one does formulate a theory of human behaviour, and that theory becomes known to the subjects whose behavior it purports to explain, it may well become itself a cause of such behavior (thus, self-fulfilling), or of some different behaviour (thus, self-denying). For these reasons, as well as others, it is widely (though hardly universally) thought necessary to depart significantly from the methods and procedures of the natural sciences in attempting to understand man's behavior, or his history.

Thus, historicists realized that, precisely in the interests of having accurate empirical knowledge about man, the methods of the natural sciences could not be considered authoritative for historical studies. Furthermore, "what 'scientific' psychology and sociology had to say about man proved to be trivial and poor if compared with what could be learned from the great historians."[42] Strauss summarizes:

> Thus history was thought to supply the only empirical, and hence the only solid, knowledge of what is truly human, of man as man: of his greatness and misery. Since all human pursuits start from and return to man, the empirical study of humanity could seem to be justified in claiming a higher dignity than all other studies of reality. History - history divorced from all dubious or metaphysical assumptions - became the highest authority.[43]

Having concluded his introductory, somewhat abstract, general

history of historicism,"[44] Strauss proceeds to argue against historicism as a philosophic position based upon "the experience of history." He begins by reasserting the point that we must concede to historicism: that our experience of actual history shows us that there is not, and never has been, a universally acknowledged set of norms. Historicism began with the hope that thorough, scientific historical studies would provide man with particular or concrete standards, standards that would be more trustworthy, more applicable than abstract, universal standards. Yet, says Strauss, "the unbiased historian had to confess his inability to derive any norms from history: no objective norms remained." The key point follows:

> The historical school had obscured the fact that particular or historical standards can become authoritative only on the basis of a universal principle which imposes an obligation on the individual to accept, or to bow to, the standards suggested by the tradition or the situation which has molded him.

The real problem lies in the fact that:

> ...no universal principle or standard will ever sanction the acceptance of every historical standard or of every victorious cause: to conform with tradition or to jump on "the wave of the future" is not obviously better, and it is certainly not always better than to burn what one has worshipped or to resist the "trend of history."[45]

Thus, says Strauss, history proves to be a manifestly unsatisfactory guide for human conduct, for all standards suggested by mere study of history prove to be fundamentally ambiguous, unreliable, not compelling. To the unbiased historian, the historical

process must appear as a "meaningless web", a realm of being in which men are free to act capriciously. The only standards that remain are subjective - "standards that have no other support than the free choice of the individual." Historicism culminates with Nietzsche, and so apparently in nihilism. The practical claim of historicism, to provide man with a more solid guidance for life than the older, prehistoricist philosophy was able to do, seems to be a manifest failure.

Historicism's seemingly new insight that the "historical process" is a meaningless web, or that history should not even be spoken of as a "process", is not a novel view, says Strauss. Indeed, it was fundamentally the classical view. Historicism's re-emphasis of this insight might have suggested a return to pre-historicist political philosophy. However, no such return was undertaken. Rather, this "new" insight was interpreted as the discovery of the essential truth about man's existence; a painful truth, but truth nonetheless. Finally, said the nineteenth and twentieth century historicists, man's rose-coloured glasses had been taken from him. Human life had been shown to be what it truly was, fundamentally meaningless: henceforth, men could stride forth in full possession of the truth, and face up nobly to the pain of becoming. Man's thoughts and experiences, and therefore, his behaviour, had been shown to be fundamentally unpredictable, capricious, radically free.

Yet, if I read Strauss correctly, he does not think that we are driven by our experience of history to accept the "existential" view of things that radical historicism has promulgated for us, and here, we are very close to the centre of Strauss's exposition and attempted refutation of the historicist position: Says Strauss:

> The historicist contention presents itself today as amply supported by historical evidence, or even as expressing an obvious fact. But if the fact is so obvious, it is hard to see how it could have escaped the notice of the most thoughtful men of the past. As regards the historical evidence, it is clearly insufficient to support the historicist contention.[46]

This short paragraph reveals two of the main planks of Strauss's argument against historicism as that argument is revealed in Natural Right and History, and certain other complementary writings. On the one hand, Strauss attempts to show that the historicist assertion that the insight that history shows that all standards of conduct have been at one time or another denied by some or many is not a new one, nor is it one that had to wait for the development of "scientific history", and that the classical political philosophers were certainly adequately aware of the variety of notions of right that always exist in human history. Secondly, Strauss attempts to show that historical evidence is not an adequate support for the historicist contention, that indeed, if anything, this evidence seems to show "that all human thought, and certainly all philosophic thought, it concerned with the same fundamental problems, and therefore that there exists an unchanging framework which persists in all changes of human knowledge of both facts

and principles."[47] He beings by expanding upon this latter plank of the argument:

> History teaches us that a given view has been abandoned in favor of another view by all men, or by all competent men, or perhaps only by the most vocal men; it does not teach us whether the change was sound or whether the rejected view deserved to be rejected. Only an impartial analysis of the view in question - an analysis that is not dazzled by the victory or stunned by the defeat of the adherents of the view concerned - could teach us anything regarding the worth of a view and hence regarding the meaning of the historical change.[48]

All historical developments must be judged philosophically as to their worth, or as to their praiseworthiness or blameworthiness: philosophy does not consist of identifying winners and losers, but of knowing the truth of things. Historicists sometimes assert that historical developments must be judged according to the standards of goodness (or of "value") that prevail contemporarily with those developments. It is claimed that each epoch gives rise to standards which are particularly appropriate for it. But this claim is itself mere dogma, or it presumes that it can be verified by transhistorical standards. In order to know that each historical epoch gives rise to its own peculiarly appropriate standard of goodness, one would have to have a transhistorical standard by which to judge standards.

In any case, and as we saw previously, for Strauss the historicist contention, if it is to have any validity, "must be based not on history but on philosophy: on a philosophic analysis proving that all human thought depends ultimately on fickle and dark fate

and not on evident principles accessible to man as man."[49] The basic tenet of that philosophic analysis is a "critique of reason", an attempt to prove that theoretical metaphysics and philosophic ethics or natural right are impossible. If all metaphysical and ethical views can be shown to be untenable, then their historical fate is deserved: each is due to be superceded, sooner or later. Thus, historicism undertakes a critique of human thought, or of all notions regarding the knowability of permanent truth about things, which includes even the positive sciences within its compass.

I previously noted that Stauss prefaces his exposition and attempted refutation of the historicist epistemological position with a discussion of the difference between historicism and conventionalism. "Skepticism" also superficially resembles historicism, and Strauss also takes time to show how skepticism is distinguished from historicism. He says that, taken by itself, the historicist's "philosophic critique of philosophic and scientific thought - a continuation of the efforts of Hume and Kant - would lead to skepticism."[50] But historicism does not embrace epistemological relativism as positively as does skepticism. Rather, most exponents of historicism are sure that their position is very far from being relativistic. Furthermore, historicism regards its essential insights as having sprung from a specific historical situation, while skepticism "regards itself as, in principle, coeval with human thought." Strauss summarizes:

> For the skeptic, all assertions are uncertain and therefore essentially arbitrary; for the historicist, the assertions that prevail at different times and in different civilizations are very far from being

> arbitrary. Historicism stems from a nonskeptical tradition - from that modern tradition which tried to define the limits of human knowledge and which therefore admitted that, within certain limits, genuine knowledge is possible. In contradistinction to all skepticism, historicism rests at least partly on such a critique of human thought as claims to articulate what is called "the experience of history."[51]

What exactly is this "experience of history," regarded by Strauss as the very core of the historicist metaphysic? Historicists, says Strauss, are sure that "no competent man or our age would regard as simply true the complete teachings of any thinker of the past." In every case, it seems, mistakes were made. Things were taken for granted that should not have been, or facts and possibilities could not have been known until their discovery in a later age. "Up to now, all thought has proved to be in need of radical revisions or to be incomplete or limited in decisive respects." Furthermore, by studying past thought, we seem to see that every progress of thought in one direction entailed a retrogression in another direction, so that when new important insights were discovered, older ones were obscured or forgotten. Taken as a whole, then, the history of human thought seems to exhibit no progress, and appears as nothing more than a process of exchanging one type of limitation for another. Finally, observation of past thought seems to show us that the most important limitations on that thought were of such a nature that they could not possibly have been overcome by earlier thinkers. Now, it is reasonable to assume that what has been characteristic of all past thought

is likely to be characteristic of future thought. Thus, according to historicism:

> Human thought is essentially limited in such a way that its limitations differ from historical situation to historical situation and that the limitation characteristic of the thought of a given epoch cannot be overcome by any human effort. There have always been and there always will be surprising, wholly unexpected, changes of outlook which radically modify the meaning of all previously acquired knowledge. No view of the whole of human life can claim to be final or universally valid. Every doctrine, however seemingly final, will be superseded sooner or later by another doctrine.[52]

Historicists will also go so far as to admit that earlier thinkers may have had insights which are wholly inaccessible to us and which will always be inaccessible to us, because our own peculiar limitations will prevent us from even suspecting that such insights are possible. For the most radical historicists, "the limitations of human thought are essentially unknowable", and "it makes no sense to conceive of them in terms of social, economic, and other conditions, that is, in terms of knowable or analyzable phenomena: the limitations of human thought are set by fate."[53]

When one thinks seriously about historicism's "experience of history" argument, one can see that it has a certain plausibility. This, says Strauss, can be easily accounted for by the preponderance of dogmatism in the thought of the past. Indeed, Strauss goes so far as to suggest that dogmatism is natural to man, and that we need not be surprised to find that most men fall prey to it. We need not even be surprised that "thinkers of the first rank have propounded all-comprehensive doctrines which they regarded

as final in all important respects - doctrines which invariably have proved to be in need of radical revision."[54] Yet, says Strauss, we must also suspect that dogmatism is not solely a preserve of the past. Indeed, "we are forced to suspect that historicism is the guise in which dogmatism likes to appear in our age." Historicism asserts the dogmatism that our "experience of history" proves that "the acquisition of new important insights necessarily leads to the forgetting of earlier important insights and that the earlier thinkers could not possibly have thought of fundamental possibilities which come to the center of attention in later ages."[55]

Strauss does not think that history shows us that we must inevitably forget important insights of the past. Nor does he think it has been shown that the history of man unfolds in such a way that a thinker of the first rank cannot imagine the fundamental possibilities of man's life. This conviction of Strauss's, that truly great thinkers are able to conceive of and pass judgement on the fundamental alternatives open to man as man, is nothing less than the core of Strauss's conception - which is the traditional conception - of what philosophy itself is. Here in Natural Right and History, Strauss chooses to defend that anti-historicist conception by making two observations about one such earlier thinker generally conceeded to be of the first rank - Aristotle. If one reads Aristotle having antecedently accepted the historicist premise - and one might accept that premise either consciously or otherwise - one might conclude that Aristotle, since he was nurtured as a Greek gentleman in a society in which slave-owning was an accepted practice, could not

have conceived of the injustice of slavery. Strauss claims that Aristotle certainly did conceive of the injustice of slavery, and he can easily be shown to be right. Careful reading of Aristotle's Politics, for instance, will show that Aristotle makes careful distinction between "natural" and "conventional" slavery. Conventional slaves are those who fall under the domination of others through the fortunes of war, or are hunted and captured by other men, and so on. Such slavery is not argued by Aristotle to be in any way just on the face of it, and he suggests that conventional slavery is very often unjust. Natural slaves, on the other hand, are for Aristotle those who are not competent to rule themselves, and whose good is served by being ruled by others who are competent for such ruling. Aristotle regards those who are hopelessly mentally retarded, for instance, as natural slaves. Whether today's readers of Aristotle are prepared to follow his discussion of slavery or not, we should pay careful attention to his distinction between natural and conventional slavery, and note that Aristotle was certainly prepared to consider that some forms of slavery may be unjust.

This aside, Strauss is ready to concede, however, that Aristotle could not have conceived of the coming into being of a world state. But why not? One cannot say with any sort of authority whatsoever that Aristotle could not have at least imagined such a thing. However, Strauss argues, one can infer from Aristotle's written political philosophy the reason for his never having chosen to write about the possibility of the amalgamation of all the states

of the world into one super-state. Strauss grants that such a world state presupposes such a development of technology as Aristotle could never have dreamed of. It is Stauss's judgement that that development of technology required, in its turn, that science be regarded as essentially in the service of the "conquest of nature" and that technology be emancipated from any moral and political supervision. Both the modern philosophic judgement upon the relationship between science and its object, nature, and the political judgement that science is somehow an apolitical activity are utterly foreign to Aristotelian philosophy. Thus, Strauss summarizes:

> Aristotle did not conceive of a world state because he was absolutely certain that science is essentially theoretical and that the liberation of technology from moral and political control would lead to disastrous consequences: the fusion of science and the arts together with the unlimited or uncontrolled progress of technology has made universal and perpetual tyranny a serious possibility.[56]

Only a rash man, says Strauss, would say that Aristotle's view that science is essentially theoretical, and his judgement that technological development must be subjected to moral and political control, has been refuted. Who would be prepared to deny that these are fundamental problems today, as they were in Aristotle's time?

The Fundamental Problems?

At this point, some attempt to summarize Strauss's characterization of the philosophic case for historicism may prove helpful. We have seen that, for Strauss, historicism rests on a philosophic

critique of the possibility or the knowability of natural right, and, more comprehensively, upon a critique of all human thought in general, somehow connected with experience or knowledge of history. We have also seen that, for Strauss, the connection between the historicist critique of the sort of human thought that attempts to grasp the eternal or the transhistorical and our empirical experience of history should not be assumed to be a simple or a vulgar one in all cases: little reflection is needed before one realizes that the mere fact that all principles of right or justice or anything else have at some time been denied does not, by itself, necessitate our concluding that these principles have been proven wrong. The historicist view of reality cannot, it seems, be presumed to rest solely on so easily refuted a connection between experience and thought as that. Rather, says Strauss:

> When speaking of the "experience" of history, people imply that this "experience" is a comprehensive insight which arises out of historical knowledge but which cannot be reduced to historical knowledge. For historical knowledge is always extremely fragmentary and frequently very uncertain, whereas the alleged experience is supposedly global and certain. Yet it can hardly be doubted that the alleged experience ultimately rests on a number of historical observations.[57]

We have already seen what Strauss judges are these observations which historicism's ultimately trans-historical judgement on human thought is said to rest upon, ie., the observation that all past thought seems to have been shackled by one limitation or other, and that all future thought can be expected to be subject to a

process of exchanging one limitation for another. If this historicist inference about human thought were true, either in its judgement about past thought, and/or in its prediction for future thought, then all philosophy (and all science) truly would be consigned to Plato's "cave", unable to free itself of delusion, and unable to grasp any eternal truth about things, even supposing such truths exist.

I noted earlier that Professor Strauss interprets the evidence of the history of human thought as demonstrating, in exact opposition to histocisism's interpretation of that evidence, "that all human thought, and certainly all philosophic thought, is concerned with the same fundamental themes or the same problems," which is to say, the same questions. He goes on to observe that:

> This inference is obviously compatible with the fact that clarity about these problems, the approach to them, and the suggested solutions to them differ from thinker to thinker or from age to age.

The point of this inference is, for Strauss, as follows:

> If the fundamental problems persist in all historical change, human thought is capable of transcending its historical limitation or of grasping something trans-historical. This would be the case even if it were true that all attempts to solve these problems are doomed to fail and that they are doomed to fail on account of the "historicity" of "all" human thought.[58]

And this may be enough for philosophy, enough to justify the philosophic life: that there are permanent questions, clarity about which is essential, if one is to be other than a benighted dogmatist. I think that for Strauss, traditional philosophy is

successfully defended by showing that there are permanent questions. And parenthetically, one has shown that there is at least one permanent answer, if one can affirm that there are indeed permanent questions.

This having been said however, one also needs to say, as does Strauss in Natural Right and History, that to leave the case at this point would be manifestly unsatisfactory, for it would leave at least political philosophy with persistent problems for which it could find no solution. This, for Strauss, would have no less portentious a consequence than that men would be left with no reasoned guidance for their actions. There could be no natural right if all that men could be aware of was the problem of right. There could not be reasoned, principled human life if political thought were not "capable of solving the problem of the principles of justice in a genuine and hence universally valid manner."

Those who have studied politics to any extent, and especially, those who have reflected on the essential questions of purpose in politics, or on the question of what just political action is, cannot help but be aware of the large problem that political thought poses for itself when it tries to answer "in a genuine and hence universally valid manner" the question "what is justice?" Certainly Strauss cannot be justly accused of underestimating the magnitude of that problem. However, and here we come to the nucleus of his attempted refutation of historicism, Strauss is convinced that historicism cannot deny at least the possibility of that solution, for he feels that

its own contention implies the admission of this possibility. Strauss points to what I shall call the essential paradox of historicism (or, more generally, the paradox of relativism):

> By asserting that all human thought, or at least all relevant human thought, is historical, historicism admits that human thought is capable of acquiring a most important insight that is universally valid and that will in no way be affected by any future surprises. The historicist thesis is not an isolated assertion: it is inseparable from a view of the essential structure of human life. This view has the same trans-historical character or pretension as any natural right doctrine.[59]

Thus, historicism is inherently paradoxical. It asserts that all human thought is transitory, due to perish. Yet, we are entitled to ask about the truth status of that assertion itself. Is that very assertion, that all human thought is transitory, itself due to be superseded tomorrow by some new "truth"? Historicism itself is a human thought, says Strauss: "hence historicism can be of only temporary validity, or it cannot be simply true. To assert the historicist thesis means to doubt it and thus to transcend it." And we may read another implication into this argument of Strauss's: to assert the historicist thesis as a universal and eternal truth immediately leaves open the possibility that there may be a host of other universal truths, for to assert one universal truth is to admit the possibility of universal truth per se. Furthermore it would be difficult indeed, it would seem, to maintain the argument that the historicist thesis is somehow unique as regards its "universal truthfulness", as it were, for this assertion would

require that one have some criterion of discrimination whereby one determined what sort of things could be known to be universally true, and this criterion would itself be trans-historical; thus, in attempting to assert the uniqueness of the historicist thesis, one would end up by paradoxically multiplying "universal truths."

Strauss concludes his demonstration of the essentially paradoxical nature of the historicist thesis as follows:

> The historicist is not impressed by the prospect that historicism may be superseded in due time by the denial of historicism. He is certain that such a change would amount to a relapse of human thought into its most powerful delusion. Historicism thrives on the fact that it inconsistently exempts itself from its own verdict about all human thought. The historicist thesis is self-contradictory or absurd. We cannot see the historical character of "all" thought - that is, of all thought with the exception of the historicist insight and its implications - without transcending history, without grasping something trans-historical.60

Prior to concluding my consideration of Strauss's explicit treatment of historicism in Natural Right and History, I would ask the reader to recall the distinction made in Part I of this thesis, between "theoretical" and "radical" historicism. It was Strauss's belief that both in the historical and in the philosophic sense, theoretical historicism culminates in, or becomes, radical historicism. Thus, the bulk of his attempted refutation of the historicist view in Natural Right and History is meant to count primarily against radical historicism. The question I would now like to address is whether or not theoretical historicism is parodoxically relativistic in the same way as is radical historicism. I believe the answer

is yes, and that theoretical historicism can no more deny the possibility of political philosophy than can its radical counterpart.

Theoretical historicism, à la Hegel (and Marx), defines itself by the attempt to show how the historicist thesis can be true and objective for all time without itself claiming to transcend history. In other words, theoretical historicists assert that, properly understood, history itself is so ordered that it reveals the fundamentally historical or relative character of all human thought, and that this insight is a reliable, or a true one, not due to be superseded at some future time. Fate has so ordered man's history that the essential truth of his existence, that he is a fundamentally historical being, will be revealed to him at some "privileged moment" in the historical process. If the truth is not at any and all times immediately available to man as man via the unaided exercise of his reason, it is at least given to him by "unfathomable fate". It is given to man, by a capricious cosmos, at a certain time in his history, "to realize the radical dependence of thought on fate."[61] Thus, said Hegel (and Marx), history is so ordered that the historicity of human thought has an upper limit, and there is an absolute or privileged moment at which the "essential character of all thought becomes transparent." This assumption of an absolute moment is, it seems to me, absolutely essential to historicism, lest that philosophy be left open to the demonstration of paradoxicality that Strauss has undertaken. But does the assumption of an absolute moment remove the paradoxicality of the position? One is hard-pressed

to understand how theoretical historicism is not as thoroughly paradoxical as is the more radical variety of that view. The problem is the one of validating a theory of history, whatever shape it might take, which purports to show that one stands at the absolute moment in history. As Strauss put it, "one must show, somehow, how the absolute moment can be recognized as such."[62] Any attempt to do this, it seems, merely puts the paradox of relativism back one step. To recognize the absolute moment at which one can recognize the eternal truth that all previous thought is relative to time and place and due to be superseded, one must have some theory of history which shows one that one stands at the absolute moment. That theory is logically prior to the recognition of the absolute moment: therefore, we must, it seems to me, always be beset by the thought that our theory of history is historically relative, and due to be contradicted somewhere along the line. How can we possibly recognize the absolute moment as such? Theoretical historicism is as thoroughly paradoxical as its radical counterpart.

NOTES TO PART II

[1] Indeed, one suspects that the work on the problem of historicism that has been done by Strauss and those of similar philosophic persuasion has played and/or is playing a not totally insignificant part in the establishment of the currently accepted meaning of the term 'historicism'.

[2] Although Professor Strauss's interpretation of the history of political philosophy is too involved to go into in any great detail, we may say something in brief about his use of the term "modern". Professor Stauss divides political thought into two main epochs; the "ancient" period and the "modern" period. "Modernity" effectively begins with the thought of Machiavelli, who first made respectable the notion that political thought, and therefore, actual political practice, ought not to be concerned with the perfecting of the character of men through the perfection of their regimes, this being the concern that had occupied earlier political thinkers. Rather, said Machiavelli, political thought ought to accept man as he is, as he appears always and everywhere in the great majority of cases, and thereby, to be concerned with the elucidation and application of techniques whereby man's supposedly base nature might be controlled for the purpose of guaranteeing peaceful political communities. For Strauss, Machiavelli radically lowered the goal of politics, from perfection of character to mere survival, and he thinks that Hobbes and his successors followed Machiavelli in this regard. Strauss's writings on the topic of "ancient" vs. "modern" political philosophy are too numerous to mention here. The reader is invited to consult the bibliography appended to this essay for some examples. Regarding the notion of "technique" as it bears on modernity, the writings of George Grant are useful. See, for instance, Technology and Empire.

[3] Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation", in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p.143. Weber is quoting Tolstoi.

[4] Croce, History as the Story of Liberty, p.34.

[5] Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?", included in the book by the same name, p.16.

[6]In both parts of PART II, that is, in both my attempts to characterize political philosophy, and thereby to show how historicism represents a fundamental challenge to that enterprise, and in my attempt to show how this challenge is not successful, I shall rely to a considerable extent on the thought of Professor Strauss. Let me hasten to add that I think that there is a fundamentally important sense in which there are no "authorities" in philosophy. That is, I believe that if one were to accept the utterances of any philosopher as dogma or as doctrine, one would have at that point ceased to think philosophically. Still, I also accept Professor Alan Bloom's judgement that a serious man knows that one comes to knowledge via the guidance of those who are wiser than oneself, by carefully listening to the thoughts of those whom one can see are worth listening to, and by attempting to think through what one has heard. I have found, and continue to find, Professor Strauss's thought to be a most worthwhile guide to philosophizing, to whatever extent I have been able to understand that thought. (Professor Bloom's judgement on the utility of accepting guidance for one's thinking is expressed in his introduction to Alexandre Kojève's Introduction to the Reading of Hegel (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1969), p.viii.)

[7]Leo Strauss, "What Is Political Philosophy?", p.9.

[8]"Philosophy" can, of course, be used to mean many other things. It can refer to a body of received doctrine, to a set of the most general beliefs, concepts and attitudes of an individual or group; to the love of wisdom; to a way of life; to a university course of study; and so on. Some of these meanings of the term are of considerable interest, especially as they might be seen to relate to the meaning of "philosophy" as we are using it here. However, we shall not be concerned directly with these other meanings in this essay.

[9]Strauss, "What Is Political Philosophy?", p.11. Prior to rendering this definition of philosophy, Strauss stresses its provisionality, again clearly implying that the problem of defining philosophy is a particularly difficult one. We may speculate that Strauss has in mind several reasons for this difficulty. For instance, there is a sense in which it is rather unsatisfying to base a definition of philosophy on the notion of there being a 'whole' of things to be comprehended, when it is doubtful whether anyone could say with confidence that he truly knew that whole of things, and thereby, that he knew what it was to know it. And furthermore, it is a fact that there are always those who are prepared to question

the very possibility of such knowing of the whole of things, and indeed, we are concerned with one sort of denial of this possibility in this essay.

[10] Ibid., p.10, emphasis added.

[11] Ibid.,

[12] Richard McKeon, The Basic Works of Aristotle (New York: London House, 1941), Ehtica Nicomachea, 1094a1-5.

[13] Ibid.,

[14] Ibid.,

[15] Ibid., 1094 a28-b8.

[16] George P. Grant, Philosophy in the Mass Age (Copp Clark Publishing, 1966), p.103.

[17] George P. Grant, Lament For a Nation (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1965), p.94.

[18] Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?", p.11, emphasis added.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Joseph Cropsey, editor's introduction, Ancients and Moderns: Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honour of Leo Strauss (New York: Basic Books, 1964), p.ix.

[21] Henry M. Magid, "An Approach to the Nature of Political Philosophy", Journal of Philosophy, Vol. LII, No.2, 1955, p.29.

[22] Henry M. Magid, "Political Philsoophy as the Search for Truth", in Cropsey, ed., Ancients and Moderns, p.304.

[23] Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, p.75, emphasis the author's.

[24] Ibid., p.76.

[25]Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy", p.39.

[26]Strauss, "What Is Political Philosophy?", p.33. In this particular passage, Strauss is again alluding to the fundamental difference between political philosophy and any theological account of the basis of law: the Bible gives no account of the importance of "regime" because its authors believed that human laws are ultimately grounded in God's laws, in revelation of inscrutable, divine design. Elsewhere, Strauss speaks of another sometimes accepted grounding for law, ancestral piety, and observes that political philosophy, in resorting to a seasoned account of the basis for law, also challenges tradition.

[27]Ibid., p.34.

[28]Leo Strauss, The City and Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p.1.

[29]Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), p.9.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., p.10. No-one could possibly read Aristotle's Politics, for instance, and argue that Aristotle was not sufficiently aquainted with "history" to know that men disagree about principles of justice, or social organization. The first words of that book are the phrase "observation shows us", and Aristotle shows that he has observed many actual examples of different notions of justice as they had been put into practice by the constitutions of many of the city-states of his day.

[33]Ibid. Strauss also makes this point of the beginning of "Political Philosophy and History", included in What is Political Philosophy? (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1959), p.56.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid., p.11.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid., p.12.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., p. 13.

[40] Ibid., p. 16.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., p. 17. Those of us who have read a little contemporary political science are also aware of the points that have been made in this regard in opposition to behaviouralism by those students of politics who rely upon a more "traditional" way of studying man's behaviour, an approach which relies upon the exercize of "wisdom" and "judgement", and which consciously borrows insights from philosophy, history, and law. See for example Hedley Bull, "International Theory: The Case for a Classical Approach", World Politics, Vol. 18, Apr. 1966, pp. 361-377.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Strauss does a great deal more in Natural Right and History by way of showing how historicism developed. Indeed, the whole book takes this for its theme, as Strauss examines the history of philosophic thought from Hobbes to Burke, showing how successive developments in modern liberal thought became increasingly, if only implicitly, relativistic and so paved the way for the radical epistemological/ethical relativism of historicism.

[45] Ibid., p. 17.

[46] Ibid., p. 19.

[47] Ibid., p. 23.

[48] Ibid., p. 19.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., p. 20.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., p. 21.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., p. 22. Although Strauss does not choose to make the observation at this point in Natural Right and History, one may infer from other of his writings that he does not think that all past philosophers propounded dogmatic doctrine. In

particular, Strauss does not think that Plato, whom I suspect Strauss regards as possibly the greatest thinker who ever lived, was in any way dogmatic. By virtue of the ironic, dialogue style of writing that he chose to employ, Plato consciously avoided all possibility of dogmatic assertion. There is no clearly identifiable doctrine in Plato. There is certainly a Platonic teaching, according to Strauss, but it is a teaching about how to philosophize for oneself. The Platonic dialogues do not constitute an attempt to formulate a comprehensive set of dogmatic, philosophic doctrines. See, in particular, "On Plato's Republic", in The City and Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 50-138.

[55] Ibid. It needs to be pointed out here that Strauss is speaking of 'radical' historicism at this point, and not necessarily of what I shall subsequently refer to as 'progressive' historicism. For instance, I do not think that R.G. Collingwood believes that we must, of necessity, forget earlier important insights, and Strauss is certainly aware of this.

[56] Strauss, Natural Right and History, p. 23.

[57] Ibid., p. 22.

[58] Ibid., p. 24.

[59] Ibid., emphasis added.

[60] Ibid., p. 25.

[61] Ibid., p. 28.

[62] Ibid., p. 29.

PART III R.G. COLLINGWOOD'S PROGRESSIVIST HISTORICISM.

"...mind has no fixed given nature..."

R.G. Collingwood

R.G. Collingwood was a man who was much concerned with moral or ethical principles. Thus, although he did not call his work "political philosophy", he was moved to think about the broad problems of politics. In Speculum Mentis, an early attempt at philosophic synthesis, Collingwood stated a principle which was to imbue all of his subsequent thinking:

> All thought exists for the sake of action. We try to understand ourselves and our world only in order that we may learn how to live.[1]

Collingwood felt that the modern world, or more specifically, Western civilization, had reached a crisis point. There were, for Collingwood, two obvious symptoms of the malaise that had created this crisis. On the one hand, he thought that the public in Western democracies was ignoring the realms of artistic, religious, and philosophic "experience" (Collingwood's term) in their life to a degree virtually unprecedented in the history of the West. On the other hand, one could point to the instance of the First World War, a conflict unprecedented in its magnitude and destructiveness, as a symptom of the decay of modern life. He felt that he knew the cause of the disease that he saw infecting modern Western civilization: Modern man had become unhappy because he did not know what to do, how to live.[2] This confusion was in contradistinction to the self-assurance of medieval man, who lived in a society dominated by the corporatist politics of the

guild system, and who believed, thereby, that there was a unity of the forms of human experience of the world. Medieval man's life, in its artisitc, religious and philosophic aspects, was given meaning by the leadership of the great guilds, and there was no perceived conflict in the accounts of the world and of human life as given by art, religion and philosophy. The Renaissance brought to prominence a form of human experiencing of the world that had existed, in its essence, since the time of ancient Greece - scientific thinking - and, according to Collingwood, artificially sundered the artistic, religious, scientific and philosophic forms of experience of things. Seventeenth century science succeeded in the artificial separation of means from end, will from intellect, action from thought, business man from scientist, and so on, leaving post-Renaissance man unable to know how to live. Thus, for Collingwood, it was of the utmost importance, in a political sense, that the five forms of the human mind's experience of the world - art, religion, science, history, and philosophy - be brought back together again into their natural unity, this being the task of philosophy. Speculum Mentis, or "The Map of Knowledge", as he alternatively called it, was Collingwood's early attempt, following Hegel to a large extent, to set man's house, the house of mind, back in its rightful order.

I have observed that Collingwood's thinking was importantly affected by the experience of WWI, the war that men of his generation had come to call "The Great War", or "The War to End All Wars." He felt that man's technological knowledge had far out-stripped his wisdom or judgement, his ability to control his

use of technology, his ability to use his recently won mastery over nature wisely, to good end. In An Autobiography, written in 1938, Collingwood re-emphasized the political direction in which his thought was meant to point, this time having been re-inspired along these lines by his observation of the rise of Naziism in Europe. We read the following words in the culminating paragraph of that book:

> I know that Fascism means the end of clear thinking and the triumph of irrationalism. I know that all my life I have been engaged unawares in a political struggle, fighting against these things in the dark. Henceforth I shall fight in the daylight.[3]

Collingwood began his overt fight against irrationalism in man's life with a book in which he concerned himself more directly with politics than he had theretofor, The New Leviathan. This work, published in 1942, expresses Collingwood's admiration for Hobbes's absolutist political teaching, and was his last book. Thus, we may confidently assert that Collingwood, although not thought of primarily as a political philosopher, was, nonetheless, like so many reflective men before him, driven to the attempt to think through the comprehensive or architectonic problems of politics. His observations and theories as expounded in Speculum Mentis and An Autobiography demonstrate that he meant his work to be more than merely a contribution to the academic discussion of historiography. Rather, he addressed his work to all thinking men, to men as men, as did virtually all political philosophers before our time.

Collingwood's thought affords an opportunity for a particularly

useful study of historicist philosophy for a number of reasons. For one thing, Collingwood self-consciously wrote in such a manner that his thought would be accessable to those who cared to take the trouble to read carefully. He did not use an obscure technical vocabulary, whether extant or invented by himself. He wrote an autobiography which provides the student of his thought with a clear, concise, and even charming introduction to and overview of his philosophy. But apart from his helpful concern to be readable and understandable, Collingwood is of considerable interest as a study in historicism for at least two more substantive reasons. He, more than most exponents of historicst thought, had the courage (not to say, the temerity) to pursue that way of thinking to what is perhaps its ultimate conclusion: Collingwood believed that not even the questions that man confronts are permanent. He asserted nothing less than that all human thought is transitory, down to and including the very questions that men ask about their life and the universe that they inhabit. And; perhaps relatedly, he explicitly challenged the validity of the very enterprise of psychology, that is, the attempt to know what man is, simply. In other words, he challenged a fundamental premise of traditional political philosophy, that there is a fixed nature of the human soul which it is possible for man to know.

It is to Collingwood's credit that he endeavored to return European thought to a concern with human purpose, and that he tried consciously to give that thought an ontological and epistemological basis. However, we are, I think, inclined and entitled

to wonder whether Collingwood's progressivist historicism provides any adequate basis for an ethics which could be expected to provide the sort of guidance for their actions that men have always required. Careful examination of Collingwood's philosophy of history, or his historical philosophy, raises real doubt as to whether historicism can ever constitute an entirely adequate basis for a science of human affairs, or for a political science, as Aristotle understood that term. For in attempting to resurrect moral science from the grave to which positivism had consigned it, Collingwood was swayed by, and contributed to, that most powerful and influential current of thought that we have been calling historicism, a mode of thinking which presents as great, if not a greater challenge to the possibility of such a moral or political science.

Much of Collingwood's writing reads as an explicit challenge to the great body of self-consciously "empirical", adamantly non-teleological, post-seventeenth century thinking that we have come to speak of as Empiricism, and more recently, as Positivism. Collingwood, following Troeltsch, Croce, and others of like mind, was concerned to show what he felt were the decisive limitiations, if not outright metaphysical errors, of "naturalistic" thinking, of which post-seventeenth century natural science was the most visible manifestation. Since Collingwood was especially interested in the overarching political problem, the problem of the good for man,[4] he was concerned to challenge positivism's explicit denial of the possibility of there being any knowledge to be had in that sphere. He challenged modern "positivistic" social thought

at its foundation by rejecting modern psychology. Collingwood made a carefully calculated turn away from any attempt to construct an eternally valid science of human nature.[5]

For Collingwood, the study of man consisted not of asking what man is, but of asking what he has done, and what he can do.[6] Thus, the study of man becomes the study of his history, and for Collingwood, the study of man's history was defined as the study of men's purposes in having performed past actions. Historiography is the study of "reflective acts":

> Reflective acts may be roughly described as the acts which we do on purpose, and these are the only acts which can become the subject-matter of history.[7]

We do not study past "events" in historiography. For instance, we are not interested in the mere fact that Vesuvius erupted in A.D. 79: we are interested in how the people who lived near the volcano reacted to its eruptions by purposive actions of various kinds.[8] Nor, to take a less ambiguous example, are we interested in the event of Caesar having crossed the Rubicon: we want to know what his purpose was in making the crossing. Mere knowledge of the event is devoid of real interest: it tells nothing of the why of that particular past event. Thus, any narrative which does not concern itself primarily and ultimately with the purposes of the relevant actors is not history. There are forms of orderly discourse or narrative of past events and processes which are like history, but they are not history; they are "pseudo-history". The stories of geological formations, animal evolution, and the like are pseudo-histories. Biographies,

being about a natural process, the birth, aging, and death of a human being, are not histories.[9] Narration of natural processes is not history. History concerns itself with actions: willed, purposeful, thoughtful actions. One cannot understand these actions from the "outside" as it were, as sequences of mere "events": an historian must get "inside" the event in question, he must rethink the thoughts of the actors of that event, and understand their purposes for their actions. All history is the history of thought. It is the "re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind."[10]

Present-day psychology, then, as an attempt to explain human affairs, is perverted by its acceptance of the epistemology of post-17th century natural science. Collingwood felt that this sort of psychology had confined itself to the study of whatever fraction of the human mind as could be seen to be governed by sensation and appetite. That "science" was neither fish nor fowl: it did not concern itself with "mind proper in the traditional sense (consciousness, reason, will) nor yet body", but "marched on the one hand with physiology, and on the other with the sciences of mind proper, logic and ethics, the sciences of reason and will."[11] Ultimately, said Collingwood, psychology reduces all the activities of the "mind proper" to the status of being epiphenomenal to the irrational part of the human consciousness.[12]

For Collingwood, then, modern psychology neglected man's "reason and will", his power to direct his desires when his purposes so dictate. Collingwood felt that Freud had done

excellent work in attempting to understand the place of irrational compulsion in the workings of the soul, but that his thought "sank beneath contempt when [it] treated of ethics, politics, religion, or social structures." Nor, said Collingwood, "was it strange that Freud's imitators and rivals, less intelligent and less conscientious writers whom I will not name reached on these subjects an even lower level."[13]

If Collingwood rejected modern psychology in particular because it did not recognize the all-important place of reason and purpose in human affairs, he also, as we have noted, rejected psychology in general as the attempt to give an eternally valid account of the nature of man, an account of that nature as it is and always has been. He felt that the soul, or "mind", as he termed it, could not be spoken of in these "naturalistic" terms, could not be described in "abstract" terms, in terms of general characteristics or principles. Collingwood held to a conception of how the soul must be thought of (and hence, of what an account of the soul's knowing of itself and of other things must consist of) that seems to be very Hegelian in character. We come to some understanding of what Collingwood's conception of "mind" was when we read the account of philosophy, that is, of the highest or ultimate of the five forms of man's "experience" of the world, as given in the culminating sections of Speculum Mentis.

In that book, Collingwood tells us that there are "two current definitions of philosophy":

> In the first place it is regarded as the return of thought upon itself,, thought ceasing to contemplate an external object and studying the process by which it comes to be aware of such an object: thought becomes self-conscious. In the second place it is regarded as the self-liberation of thought from uncriticized assumptions, the determined attempt to believe nothing except on good grounds, the surrender of all dogma, hypothesis, or opinion, and the pursuit of the ideal of knowledge as rational through and through. The first definition defines philosophy by reference to its object: the second by reference to its method.[14]

For Collingwood, each of these definitions, at least when taken singly, are unsatisfactory. The first, which defines philosophy as what we might call epistemology, "appears to imply that among the various objects of the world are objects called minds, and that philosophy is the study of these." However, says Collingwood, this defines philosophy as psychology, "which is in its aim and method scientific and not philosophical."[15] The second definition, which would seem to have been borrowed more explicitly from the conception of the philosophic enterprise given to us in Plato's dialogues, merely posits an ideal, without telling us how to set about realizing it; and indeed, according to Collingwood, that ideal is unrealizable, and therefore, so described, philosophy does not exist at all.

For Collingwood, philosophy is indeed self-consciousness,

> ...but this does not mean that there is a self standing in abstract isolation over against a world of objects and that philosophy ignores the latter and studies the former. The self and its world are correlative. I am the self that I am, simply because of the nature of the world: by studying a certain kind of world and living

> in it as my environment, I develop my own mind in a determinate way.[16]

We are, perhaps, at this point, prepared to recognize a certain implication of what one might call "Mannheimian sociologism" in these words of Collingwood's. However, more interesting for the moment is what he intends to imply about the possibility of psychology. He believes that we cannot formulate an "abstract", universal acount of the mind which defines it's structure as if it owed nothing to the world, because it indeed owes everything to the world. Philosophy is self-consciousness, but in a very minimal sense: mind is simultaneously both subject and object: "Intelligence alone is absolutely intelligible, and therefore absolute knowledge can only be knowledge of a knowing mind by itself."[17] Mind becomes both the subject which knows, and the object known. But this knowledge of self is not achieved "abstractly", through knowledge of scientific principles, by way of a scientific psychology which explains how mind itself works, operates, lives, "experiences", or whatever. For Collingwood, there are no such principles. Rather, the mind knows itself as a concrete, individual thing, rather than as an instance of some abstract universal.

I think that there is a problem with this sort of account of what the human soul is, and of how it comes to know both itself and the world of things, and it is a problem which I believe all historicist philosophies must face. The problem can be stated as follows: If man is "mind", and "mind" is this self-conscious thing which reflects the world that it experiences (and, Collingwood would add, in turn shapes that world in important ways), then how,

without an "abstract", universal account of what "mind" is, is one "mind" able to recognize another as such? How is one man to recognize other men as being what they are? One might be immediately and "concretely" aware of one's own "mind", in some sense, but what about other "minds", i.e., "that which possesses mind", as a category of things in the world? In short, it is hard to see how we may set out to study man, if man is this monadic "mind", that Collingwood, and others of like mind (so to speak) posit. It is hard to see how Collingwood can avoid at least some minimal psychological description of what "mind", and therefore, man, is, always and everywhere. An historicist must face this problem whenever he wants to claim that there is no eternally identifiable essence or nature of the thing called man: If "man" (as "mind") continually changes as radically as historicism would have us believe, how do we know what to study when we set out to talk about what we are across cultures and epochs of history? What is this thing which supposedly changes, or varies from culture to culture, epoch to epoch? Surely, there must be a thing called "mind", and it must have these reputed properties, before we can attempt to study it, or to know it, before we can attempt to clarify the common, everyday, primitive experience of the part of us that we call "mind"? And parenthetically, we might notice that the problem of knowing what "mind" is is closely related to the problem of understanding how it comes to know things. Collingwood's historicism seems to render epistemology, as the attempt to give an account of how the soul acquires knowledge, ultimately meaningless. If mind has no identifiable, fixed nature, how can we have any useful notion of how

it works, or when its "workings" are reliable, and when not? The facile answer that might be posed in reply to these questions, that "mind" is that thing which is self-consciously mutable, or that observes itself in its changeableness, doesn't seem to be altogether adequate. For instance, may we suspect that the mind's consciousness of its mutability (i.e., its one "immutable" characteristic) is itself mutable? Will the human mind, through some historical change, one day lose the consciousness of its own mutability? And furthermore, if "mind" has at least one immutable characteristic, then why may it not have others? Indeed it must have at least one other, for the mind would have to be able to distinguish its one immutable characteristic from its mutable ones, in order for anyone to be able to state with any authority that the mind has only one immutable characteristic. Thus, it seems, the mind must have a second immutable characteristic: the ability to distinguish its mutable features from its immutable ones. And so it goes.

If Collingwood rejected positivistic natural science's methods for the study of man, and related conclusions regarding the governing of men, and if he rejected psychology as a basis for knowing what is good for man to do, he did not adopt a political relativism: he thought that a basis for an ethics to which reason would demand that all men adhere could be found in history. History would have to be shown to dictate certain rules for behaviour, and men could come to know these rules through the proper study of history. In a chapter of his Autobiography entitled "The Foundations of the Future," Collingwood asked the question which his thought led him to answer in the affirmative:

> Was it possible that men should come to a better understanding of human affairs by studying history? Was history the thing which in future might play a part in civilized life analogous to that of natural science in the past?"[18]

Collingwood acquired a fascination for history, and especially for history of thought, at a very early age. His father gave him lessons in ancient and modern history previous to his attending public school, and indeed, Collingwood claims to have discovered before his teens his calling as an historian of thought, upon chancing upon a copy of Descarte's Principia, hidden away in a friend's household artifacts. This book, he tells us, impressed him with the historicity of natural science, teaching him "that science is less like a hoard of truths, ascertained piecemeal, than an organism which in the course of its history undergoes more or less continuous alteration in every part." [19] Throughout his academic career, Collingwood was a practicing historian and archeologist, in addition to his overriding interest in philosophy. His historical specialty was Roman Britain, and at times in his career he felt the need to "return to his roots" as it were, by engaging in the practice of actual historical research.

Collingwood formed the impression that one could learn much more from an archeological investigation by setting out to excavate with a definite question in mind than if one merely set about digging aimlessly. One did not dig merely to see what one might learn (a sort of archeological dilettantism): rather, one dug in order to find the solution to a very definite historical problem or set of problems. From this observation regarding archeological technique, Collingwood went on to formulate an account of human

knowing which has profound implications indeed. He was led to reject the epistemology of what he called the Oxford "realists" (John Cook Wilson, H.A. Prichard, H.W.B. Joseph, E.F. Carrit, and others). According to Collingwood, G.E. Moore at Cambridge and Alexander at Manchester held to an epistemology which was similar to that of the "realists", and he rejected it for the same reasons. These eminent British philosophers and teachers regarded the act or process of knowing as a simple "intuiting" or "apprehending" of some reality.[20] For Collingwood, this could not be true, for he was sure that whatever questions one asked of the universe were half the act of knowing.[21] Accordingly, he understood himself to have formulated a new logic, a "logic of question and answer," based upon the principles elucidated for natural science by Bacon and Descartes in the 17th century. At times, he characterized this "new logic" as a sort of Baconianism: one brings certain <u>questions</u> to one's experience of empirical phenomena. One does not passively experience nature, but as Bacon might have said, "puts her to the question": one "tortures" or "vexes" nature, in demanding that she yield up her secrets.

Thus, Collingwood rejected what he called "propositional logic," i.e., any system of verification of statements, or criterion of truth, which posits that a proposition is true in and of itself. Collingwood denied the following four "theories of truth":

1) A proposition is either true or false in itself (i.e. is either logical or illogical).

2) Correspondence Theory: a proposition is true or false according to whether or not it corresponds to some "state of things", some "fact".

3) Coherence Theory: A statement is true or false according to whether it coheres or fails to cohere with other statements.

4) Pragmatic Theory: a statement's truth or falsity is measured by its utility (i.e. true if useful, false if not).

There are, of course, various, detailed objections that can be made to some or all of these, and Collingwood was aware of them, but most importantly, he objected to them because all four theories of truth fall out of "propositional logic." According to Collingwood, one simply cannot know whether a proposition is true or false until one knows the question it is intended to answer. Similarly, one cannot know whether two propositions are contradictory or not until one knows the respective questions they are meant to answer. If each proposition is addressed to what must be seen to be a different question than the other purports to answer, the two propositions might seem contradictory when they are not.

Thus, when one is comparing the thought of two or more philosophers, one must be very careful to identify the question that each thinker has addressed himself to. Collingwood felt that the Oxford/Cambridge school of philosophic "realism" had, in their zeal to pronounce upon the truth or falsity of various doctrines, misread certain philosophers, and vilified those thinkers for mistakes which were not mistakes, if only one clearly understood the question to which each philosopher's doctrine was meant to be the answer. Consequently, he always counselled his students to read their philosophic sources very carefully indeed, so as to be clearly aware of what each writer thought he was trying to accomplish.

Collingwood might well have been correct in his observation that some of the philosophic scholarship of his day was less careful

than it might have been. And one cannot help but be sympathetic to any counsel of careful scholarship in regard to philosophic writings. However, Collingwood's views on the subject of philosophic questions form the very core of his historicism, and therefore, I think, constitute the essence of Collingwood's challenge to the great tradition of political philosophy. If in what follows, I seem to belabour the point of Collingwood's views regarding the status and nature of questions, both in philosophy and in politics, it is for this reason: I see those views as being the logical culmination of historicism's critique of political philosophy.

For Collingwood, to concentrate upon trying to prove the truth or falsity of philosophic propositions is to miss the point entirely. One is not paying enough attention to history when one so occupies oneself. According to Collingwood, careful study of the history of philosophic thought shows that no two thinkers addressed precisely the same question. One would better expend one's efforts in trying to grasp clearly the question addressed by each thinker, than in trying to decide whether his proposition could be verified according to some fallacious theory of truth.

Collingwood left no doubt that he believed nothing less than that there are no permanent questions. He tells us this directly and explicitly in his second to last book, An Essay On Metaphysics, published in 1940. But before we are ready to understand the connection between the realm of man's everyday affairs, or the political realm, and what Collingwood says about philosophy in Essay on Metaphysics, we must have a clearer idea of what he thinks philosophy is, and what its place is in the life of man. For this,

we need to go back to the earlier work, Speculum Mentis.

In Speculum Mentis, Collingwood attempted to give a new "map of knowledge", an account of the different ways in which the human mind "experiences", or comes to "know" the world that it inhabits.[22] He gives us an account of five forms of "experience" of the world which is clearly meant to reflect the order in which man has matured through these phases in his historical development, from the time of the caveman to the present. It seems that this account is also supposed to be a temporally accurate account of the five stages of maturation of the individual human mind, from childhood to adulthood, although Collingwood is not so explicit about this implication as he is in telling us that his account of the mind's experiential growth is historically accurate. Nor does he tell us in any explicit way whether all men, or just some men, possess the capacity to grow into full awareness of all five of the mind's modes of experience of things. However, we need not sort out Collingwood's views on these matters in order to proceed with what is important to us vis-a-vis his attitude to the status of questions.

According to Collingwood in Speculum Mentis, the mind's most primitive mode of experience is the artistic form of experience: we experience the world as instances of beauty and not-beauty. Beauty is the meaning of things. In the grip of this mode of experiencing the world of things, we are fanciful, capricious, and imaginative. We are childlike: we are playful, and make no assertions about the way of the world. Thus, we are completely tolerant:

we do not argue about alternative conceptions of things. This sort of experiencing of the beauty of things is "monadic". That is, each event is unique: it is irrelevant to what came before and what comes after.

The religious mode of experience arises soon after the artistic mode, and is also a very primitive mode of experience. (Indeed, we find cavemen who were both artistic and religious.) For the religious mode, God (or gods) is the measure and the meaning of all things. As such, and in contradistinction to the artistic experience of the world, religion is assertive: it has a cosmological doctrine to propound, and a set of ethics to defend. It seeks to bring all men under one, embrasive account of the world. Thus, the religious form of experience is not playful: although ultimately based in an act of faith, it is a "collective caprice", which seeks to impose conformity.

Science follows religion in the temporal order of the development of man, and is, like religion, assertive. For Collingwood, the scientific mode of experience came to prominence in the 17th century, and he identifies Bacon (correctly, I think) as the most important originator of scientific thinking in this context. For Collingwood, the scientific way of experiencing things flows logically out of religion: it attempts "to bridge the gulf between God and the world."[23] That is, science posits "depersonalized gods" - universal abstractions, principles, relations, and so on, which rule with an iron hand over all individual instances of those things.

Science reifies concepts, sets them up as presiding over empirical reality: it regards concepts or laws as real things that structure and order the phenomena of the world. For Collingwood, science ignores fact: it sees universals where there are only particulars. He identifies Plato as the originator of the scientific mode of thinking about the world, although this doctrine did not capture men at large previous to the 17th century, and Bacon's restatement of its essential tenet. However, despite its mistaken premise that there are universals which preside over the concrete, science was an advance as a mode of experiencing things because it gave man "the gift of spiritual freedom."[24] Science gave us freedom from God's domination of our thinking, and therefore, of our action. Parenthetically, one sees clearly, in his whole account of man's mental life, Collingwood's attempt, following Croce, to liberate man from all external constraint on his actions. That is, one sees full-blown "humanist" historicism in Speculum Mentis. One sees an attempt to liberate man from both the "transcendentalism" of Plato and of Hegel.

It was not until the 19th century in Europe that the fourth form of experience, the historical mode, came into existence. Historical thinking is defined by observation of fact, and this is the pre-condition of all thinking, ultimately. To experience the world historically is to realize that every event is absolutely unique: history deals only with "concrete", individual fact, and eschews spurious generalization. Fact is the "absolute object" of historical

thinking. There is a problem with historical thinking, however; we cannot, in looking at the past, surmount our own prejudices - bias is inevitable, objectivity impossible. But, history at least teaches us, at long last, what is truly knowable, what the object of human knowing must be: 1) it must be an object of thought, not merely of imagination, as it is for art; 2) it must be concrete and individual, like the work of art; 3) it must be absolute and eternal, like the object of religion, that is, it must be true (we recall that the object of art is mere fancy, not truth); 4) like the object of science, and unlike the object of religion, the object of history must be a real object, and not some imaginative or metaphysical presentation of the object. (For Collingwood, religious doctrine is intended ultimately to be a metaphysical representation of the world); 5) it must not be a (scientific, false) abstraction.

Thus, for Collingwood, the artistic, religious and scientific forms of the mind's "experience" of things culminate in historical experience, which borrows certain advances from each of the three previous modes, and avoids their mistakes. This historical mode of experience segues into the highest (latest, most highly developed) form of man's thinking - philosophy.

For Collingwood, philosophy as a mode of experience, or of thinking about things, is in an important sense the same as the historical mode: history and philosophy are one. Yet, there is also an important sense in which he intends us to see that philosophy differentiates itself from history. The full sense in which Collingwood

conceives of history and philosophy as being at once the same and different modes of thought is in a way the very theme of my entire consideration of Collingwood. Indeed, the related question of how it is that historicism in general collapses all human thinking into historical thinking is the central problem of this examination of historicism. Here, however, we need no more than some fairly clear notion of what Collingwood's conception of "historical philosophy", if we may call it that, implies.

The philosophical form of experience springs out of the historical form: without history's defeat of its scientific predecessor, philosophy would not have come into existence. "Philosophy, like history, is essentially the assertion of concrete reality, the denial of all abstraction, all generality, everything in the nature of a law or formula." [26] But philosophy asserts "concrete reality" in a different way than does history. Each of the other four forms of human experiencing of the world are, for Collingwood, really nascent philosophy. They are "philosophical errors", which point beyond themselves to genuine thinking. Each posits an "object" of thought, or of the mind's working, which is mythical, chimerical, unrealizable: art posits beauty as the mind's object; religion, God; science, abstract universals; and history, concrete <u>fact</u>.

The sort of "fact" that pre-philosophic, 19th century historical thinking posits as the "object" of the mind is fact which remains "unaffected" or "unconditioned" by the act of knowing it. This notion that there can be historical fact which can be "intuited"

or "apprehended" by the mind and left unchanged thereby is, for Collingwood, an example of the sort of "realist" thinking that I alluded to earlier.[27] None of the objects of thought professed by the artistic, religious, scientific and historical forms of experience are "intelligible", in the final analysis: "Intelligence alone is absolutely intelligible, and therefore absolute knowledge can only be the knowledge of a knowing mind by itself."[28] For Collingwood, it is clear, "all knowledge is self-knowledge":[29] the only truly intelligible object of human reason is mind itself. Thus, we come to Collingwood's definition of the philosophic mode of experience or thought: philosophy is that form of human experience which recognizes that subject and object are one. The philosopher is he who recognizes this "synthesis of opposites", that is, how subject and object are both same and different.[30] We now understand how, in Collingwood's thinking, the philosophic mode differentiates itself from or rather, incorporates and transcends, the strictly historical mode of human experiencing. The philosopher knows that the true object of historical study is past thoughts, and that when these thoughts become known to a subsequent mind, they are changed, added to, by that mind. The "subject" affects the "object".

How does this interaction between past thoughts and present thoughts take place, or rather, why must present thought change past thought? To answer this, we must turn from Collingwood's earlier work, Speculum Mentis, and consult the Essay on Metaphysics, one of the final statements of his thought.

If "metaphysics", or what Aristotle called "first Philosophy", is not thought by everyone to be coterminous with "philosophy" itself, it is at least thought by almost everyone to be an indispensible, fundamental part of the enterprise of "philosophy". This is as true for Collingwood as for any other thinker. But "metaphysics" means different thing to different people, and Collingwood held to a peculiar notion of what "metaphysics" is, one consciously and avowedly anti-Aristotelian, constituting the very core of his historicism, and which is central to my case that Collingwood believed there are no permanent questions.

An important thing that, according to Coolingwood, the mind may know about itself is that it must, and does, make "absolute presuppositions". These are the axioms of thinking: without them, thinking cannot take place. Absolute presuppositions are logically, if not temporally, prior to any real thinking. In An Essay on Metaphysics, Collingwood has a chapter, Chapter IV, "On Presupposing", in which he advances a number of "propositions" which explain to the reader what he means by "absolute presuppositions". He begins with a proposition which is a central tenet of his "logic of question and answer": "Every statement that anybody ever makes is made in answer to a question."[31] These may be statements made publicly, or in the course of solitary thinking. Furthermore, "every question involves a presupposition."[32] (Indirectly, of course, a question involves many presuppositions, but it has at least one direct presupposition). For instance, if you ask a man whether or not he has stopped beating his wife, (and this is Collingwood's

example), you presuppose that he has been in the habit of beating his wife. But, we may further ask whether it is true that the man beats his wife. And the answer to that question might lead us to question the way that answer was arrived at, i.e., we might want to question the credibility of suchever evidence as was brought forward in answer to our further query. The point is that these sorts of second-order answers are all "relative presuppositions": they "stand relatively to one question as its presupposition and relatively to another question as its answer."[33] They are presuppositions which are suspended within succeeding levels of an inquiry, and which are themselves subject to verifiability, i.e., they are presuppositions which it makes sense to ask further questions about.

An absolute presupposition, on the other hand, "is one which stands, relatively to all questions to which it is related, as a presupposition, never as an answer."[34] "The buck stops here", so to speak: a line of questioning has reached bedrock when it unearths an absolute presupposition. It is senseless to question further. Collingwood gives an example to show just what he means by this notion, and it is worth quoting him at length on this crucial point:

> Thus if you were talking to a pathologist and asked him 'what is the cause of the event E which you say sometimes happens in this disease?' he will reply 'the cause of E is C'; and if he were in a communicative mood he might go on to say 'That was established by So-and-So, in a piece of research, that is now regarded as

> classical.' You might go on to ask: 'I suppose before So-and-so found out what the cause of E was, he was quite sure it had a cause?' The answer would be "Quite sure, of course'. If you now say 'Why?' he will probably answer "Because everything that happens has a cause.' If you are importunate enought to ask 'But how do you know that everything that happens has a cause?' he will probably blow up right in your face, because you have put your finger on one of his absolute presuppositions, and people are apt to be ticklish in their absolute presuppositions. But if he keeps his temper and gives you a civil and candid answer, it will be to the following effect. 'That is a thing we take for granted in my job. We don't question it. We don't try to veryify it. It isn't a thing anybody has discovered, like microbes or the circulation of the blood. It is a thing we just take for granted.'[35]

According to Collingwood, the pathologist in his example is telling his ardent questioner that the presupposition that everything has a cause is an absolute one in his line of work. (Collingwood is under the impression that there are other branches of natural science in which this assumption is no longer made, but does not elaborate on this belief, or its possible consequences).

For Collingwood, the defining task of metaphysics is the identificiation of absolute presuppositions. "Metaphysics is the science of absolute presuppositions." As such, it is an historical discipline: the metaphysician is an historian of thought whose job it is to ferret out the absolute presupposition of each thinker, and of each epoch. These presuppositions <u>change</u> from time period to time period: the metaphysician's work, if it is honestly done, will convince

him "that there are no 'eternal' or 'crucial' or 'central' problems in metaphysics. It will rid him of the parish-pump idea that the metaphysical problems of his own generation or, more likely, the one next before his own are the problems that all metaphysicians have been worrying about ever since the world began."[36] I need hardly add that, since all questions ultimately track back to absolute presuppositions in Collingwood's system, and all absolute presuppositions are transitory, then for Collingwood, there are no permanent questions.

Once one has read An Essay on Metaphysics in conjunction with Speculum Mentis, and thereby has been left with little doubt as to whether or not Collingwood thought there are no permanent questions, one is prepared to recognize how that conclusion appears in and colours other parts of his written legacy. For instance, in his last work, The New Leviathan, Collingwood says that a proper study of mind, that is, an historical study of mind, "does not ask what mind is; it asks only what mind does." Furthermore, an historical study of mind "renounces all attempt to discover what mind always and everywhere does, and also only what mind has done on certain definite occasions."[37] Nathan Rotenstreich, in a useful exigisis of Collingwood's major writings, alludes to these contentions as expressed in The New Leviathan. He characterizes Collingwood's belief about mind as being an assertion that mind has no "permanent structure", but rather, that it has a "permanent function".[38]

Rotenstreich's exigesis of Collingwood points out that for Collingwood, the only permanent thing to be said about the mind is that it is perpetually active: "Nothing is permanent in mind but the process of mind itself."[39] Following upon Rotenstreich's remarks, we may add that for Collingwood, the mind's permanent "function" is to pose and answer questions. And Collingwood could not admit that some questions are permanent, for to do so would be tantamount to admitting that the mind has permanent characteristics which make certain questions eternally important to it.

We may also see Collingwood's belief that all questions are transitory in his major treatice on philosophy of history, or on historiography, The Idea of History. I have already remarked that, for Collingwood, history is the reenactment of past thought in one's own thinking. This need not be reenactment of only the thought of the remote past either. If I re-think a line of reasoning that you, or even I, thought last month, I am thinking historically. Of course, the evidence for more remote past thinking will be more problematic, and this gives rise to the necessity for establishing criteria of what counts as historical evidence, and to a concern for techniques whereby one may collect this evidence. Thus, there is a need for the professional historian. However, and this is the crucial point:

> The principles by which this evidence is interpreted change too; since the interpreting of evidence is a task to which a man must bring everything he knows: historical knowledge, knowledge of nature and man,

> mathematical knowledge, philosophical knowledge; and not knowledge only, but mental habits and possessions of every kind: and none of these is unchanging. Because of these changes, which never cease, however slow they may appear to observers who take a short view, every new generation must rewrite history in its own way; every new historian, not content with giving new answers to old questions, must revise the questions themselves; and - since historical thought is a river into which none can step twice - even a single historian, working at a single subject for a certain length of time, finds when he tries to reopen an old question that the question has changed.[40]

In this passage from The Idea of History, we see the same sort of radical relativism at work vis-a-vis questions that inheres in the philosophy expounded in Speculum Mentis, An Essay on Metaphysics, and The New Leviathan. But perhaps enough has been done by way of making clear Collingwood's claim that there are no permanent questions such that we may ask whether the claim can be regarded as convincing, or even, in the final analysis, coherent. Need we presume, for instance, that Plato and Aristotle, regardless of what they thought they were doing, were, in actuality, answering the most comprehensive questions about the universe and man's life in it as they were asked by Greek gentlemen, and no-one else, before or since?[41]

I have already asserted that the notion that there are no permanent problems or questions is not peculiar to Collingwood, and indeed, that I suspect that it is the logical consequence of

all historicist thought. The ancient Greek philosophers, "who rejected historicism before the fact," [42] acknowledged the fact that men disagree about the solutions to many important and fundamental questions. But the Greeks thought that there were certain questions which, even if ultimately insoluble, were vital to men as men, and would always have to be faced. When one begins to reflect upon that tenet of Greek thought, one wonders what would lead one to doubt it. For instance, the most basic epistemological problem, the question of what it is to know anything, is surely a problem which all thinking men must face. Historicists feel they have solved that problem, their solution taking different forms depending on the sort of historicism being espoused, but they must and do face the epistemological problem, first and foremost, as must any philosopher. The fact that there are indeed many diverging epistemological accounts may simply testify to the difficulty of the problem, rather than proving the historicity of either the question or the attempts at an answer. In appraising these different answers, we may want to take account of relevant historical circumstances, but we will not have proven an answer either right or wrong by explaining why it was particularly likely to have been propounded at a given time and place. And in any case, one can find numerous examples in the history of philosophy where answers to the key epistemological problem were promulgated and advocated in opposition to the established view of the age. These "anomalies" will be hard to explain away, if one begins by presuming that all thought is socially determined.

There is another fundamental problem that it seems anyone who would lead the philosophic life must face, a problem that is, in a somewhat different sense, as basic and as enduring as the core problem of giving an account of knowing. Can theory exist for its own sake? Is it right, or proper, or good to pursue knowledge solely for its own sake, without regard for "practical" payoff? If a truth about man's life is unrealizable in everyday living, is it a truth which one should struggle a lifetime to know? And relatedly, is a life of contemplation and perhaps teaching a good life? Should not the best thinkers, the best men, utilize their talents in practicing politics, rather than speaking their lives in "ivory tower" institutions which seem to have only a tenuous connection with the "real" world of day-to-day living? R.G. Collingwood chose the life of contemplation, teaching and writing - surely these questions were as important to him as they were for Plato when he wrote the Gorgias? The fact that Collingwood would seem to have decided that writing and teaching do indeed have significant practical payoffs does not, of course, deny that he must have faced the questions we have enumerated, as did Plato, some 2400 years ago, at the beginning of philosophy.

The very question whether or not there is anything eternal or whether all things are transitory is itself an eternal problem. Plato, or at least, Plato's Socrates, gives us one possible answer; Hegel, Nietzsche, Collingwood, and others offer other alternatives. The question of whether history makes men or men make history,

i.e., the problem of free will vs. determinism, has always vexed reflective men. And the question of the relationship between the body and the mind is surely an eternally important and fascinating question for those who would hope to explain man to himself.

In the realm of the human things, or in the realm of politics, there are also any number of questions which must be admitted to be both fundamental and enduring. When we try to understand ourselves, must we not seek to know the essential nature of courage, desire, fear, love, and so on? Must we not try to understand why some few men seem to love honour or victory above life itself, and how fewer still seem to love knowledge, while most men seem to live primarily for the sake of satisfaction of baser desires? That is to say, has not man always sought to know the nature of the human soul, in order to better understand his own behaviour? And what is happiness? Near the beginning of his Ethics, Aristotle makes the observation, at once profound and prosaic, that all men pursue it. Could Collingwood or anyone else deny this, and/or go on to deny that the question of what happiness is is important and eternal to man as man? And, of course, as I suggested in Part II of this essay, the related question of what sort of regime best promotes man's happiness is also a permanent question.

One could go on to multiply the list of important and enduring political questions virtually ad infinitum. What is/are the cause/causes of war and is war endemic to the human condition? What

essentially is the nature of the difference between men and women, and what significance if any does the sexual difference have for the family and the political community? When should a government give up trying to persuade citizens to obey the laws of the political community, and use coercion in eliciting compliance? How much force, and what kind, should be applied in such cases? Men have disagreed over the answers to all of these questions and many more and indeed, it might be possible to show that some or even all of them must in principle remain eternally problematic; but in any case, they surely seem to be eternal ones, for all practical purposes.

In The Use and Abuse of History, Neitzsche points to the fact that, since the rise of scientific history in the 19th century, Europeans have acquired a much greater awareness of their history than any previous people, and this wealth of historical knowledge has been incorporated into the nurture of the mass of men in European civilizations. It was also in 19th century Europe that the current of thought that we have been calling "historicism" arose, beginning with Hegel.[43] Nietzsche's essay leads one to conjecture about what might lead one to assume that nothing in human thought is permanent, be it answers to important questions, or even the questions themselves. A firsthand knowledge of the fact, as Collingwood pointed out, that different philosophic problems seem current at different times, or the realization that men have constructed vastly different cultures with a manifold variety of political organizations or regimes, and have constantly and radically disagreed

on how man ought to live, seems to show that most or all thought is transitory. Perhaps one is so impressed by the diversity that characterizes human thinking, one is so impressed by one's "experience of history", that one is not moved to make the effort to see any permanent regularity in it. Collingwood was a practicing historian: one might plausibly speculate that his historicist philosophy was a product of his considerable knowledge of the story of man's past as revealed by scientific history.

Speculations regarding Collingwood's philosophic nurture aside, we note that he held to a view of history which seems to be importantly different from the historicism represented by either of the two greatest figures of that genre of thought, Hegel and Nietzsche; whereas for Hegel, history was rational and progressing to a certain point in time, towards some limit, if you will, at which the sort of progress which had heretofor characterized it would cease; and whereas for Nietzsche (it would seem) history was completely nonrational, and contained within it no necessity for progress, or at least none we could presume to know; Collingwood held to a view which seems to embody important elements and consequences of both the historicism of Hegel and of Nietzsche, or which seems to vacillate between these two views.[44] This apparent vacillation between two seemingly incompatible views of history led to Collingwood's having held to certain importantly contradictory viewpoints, and I shall try to point these out.

Collingwood's thought seems to be suffused with a faith in progress. If one is to judge by what he has written in <u>The Idea</u>

of History, this faith is bolstered importantly by the history of history, or the development of scientific history, by which man can truly know his past. One sees the truth about history from the standpoint of the 19th century and beyond, by way of "Baconianism" in historiography, by way of the corroborating evidence of scientific archeology, and by way of inductive historical inference, or "a priori imagination", as Collingwood terms it.[45] Previous to this "Copernican revolution in the theory of history."[46] man's attempt to know his past was obstructed by "scissors and paste" historiography - study of history which confined itself to ferreting out what men of the past had said about themselves and their times and left for posterity, this evidence being accepted as authoritative and incontrovertible. According to Collingwood, scientific history, as something more than the mere acceptance of the testimony of so-called historical "authorities", had only come into existence as a result of the incorporation into the study of history of some of the methodology of natural science. Historians had had their "consciousness raised" by the post-medieval reform of natural science that had gone on in the 17th century.

If one remains dubious about Collingwood's seeing a progressivism at work in his history of history, one can ponder it in several explicit statements that he makes in The Idea of History. For instance, he speaks at times as if there is a sort of "progressive dialectic" at work in history:

> But in history as it actually happens there are no mere phenomena of decay: every decline is also a rise, and it is only the historian's personal failures of knowledge or sympathy - partly due to mere ignorance, partly to the preoccupations of his own practical life - that prevent him from seeing this double character, at once creative and destructive, of any historical process whatever.[47]

With this sort of statement, Collingwood begins to look vaguely Hegelian. There are other such assertions. For instance, in reference to the history of philosophic thought, he has this to say:

> In analysing the thought of philosopher, just as in analysing, say, a political situation, one will always find incoherences and contradictions; these contradictions are always between retrograde and progressive elements; and it is of the utmost importance, if we are to make anything of our analysis, to distinguish correctly which are the progressive elements and which the retrograde. The great merit of studying our subject historically is that it enables us to make this distinction with certainty.[48]

According to Collingwood, then, there would seem to be a progressive dialectic operating both at the level of philosophic thought and at the political level. Had Collingwood gone on to tie these processes to the process of technological change in man's history, he might well have been adopted by the numerous followers of that worldly Hegelian, Karl Marx.

This notion of progress in philosophic thought points towards the centre of Collingwood's progressivist historicism. If history is the reenactment of past thought in the minds of present men,

then the past is never obliterated: in becoming known to present men, and in being changed by their rethinking of it, it is a living past. Collingwood objects to the notion (which, he says, is the logical consequence of much modern thinking) that human nature is evolutionary in the same way that Darwin theorized other species of life to be. The historical process is not one that is characterized by the total obliteration of certain types of thinking so that others may supersede it. Collingwood is conscious of the sort of relativism that such a belief would lead to:

> The past, in a natural process, is a past superseded and dead. Now suppose the historical process of human thought were in this sense an evolutionary process. It would follow that the ways of thinking characteristic of any given historical period are ways in which people must think then, but in which others, cast at different times in a different mental mould, cannot think at all. If that were the case, there would be no such thing as truth: according to the inference correctly drawn by Hebert Spencer, what we take for knowledge is merely the fashion of present-day thought, not true but at the most useful in our struggle for existence.[49]

Thus, for Collingwood, "the past, so far as it is historically known, survives in the present."[50] And, since "man has been defined as an animal capable of profiting by the experience of others" and "the way in which this profit is realized is by historical knowledge,"[51] Collingwood believes that human thought is progressing. But, does not such a belief challenge the objective validity of historical knowledge? Surely, since "every new generation

must rewrite history in its own way", no account of history can be claimed to be finally true. History is subject to neverending revision. Collingwood is able to accept this important epistemological consequence of his historicism because of his faith in progress. As Strauss has pointed out, "he could therefore believe that if historical knowledge is relative to the present, it is relative to the highest standpoint which has ever existed."[52]

Yet, such a sanguine faith in progress is dubitable, to say the least. On the basis of the implications of Collingwood's philosophy of history, one must, I think, presume that even if Collingwood were right in his belief that history is an endless vista of progress, one could never know it to be so. This can be seen to be clearly the case via consideration of an example of progress that Collingwood gives us in The Idea of History. By way of telling us what he means by "progress", Collingwood says the following:

> The idea of historical progress, then, if it refers to anything, refers to the coming into existence not merely of mere actions or thoughts or situations belonging to the same specific type, but of new specific types. It therefore presupposes such specific novelties, and consists in the conception of these as improvements.[53]

He then gives us an example to show us clearly what he means: Suppose a community lived on fish, and the supply of fish was failing. Now, if the community switched their economy over to gathering roots for food, this would not be a progress, since nothing about root-gathering implies that is is an improvement on fishing

as a way of procuring sustenance. Suppose, however, that someone in a community of fish-eaters had discovered a more efficient way of catching fish, and persuaded the community to adopt it, a method by which a man could catch ten fish on an average day instead of five. This, says Collingwood, would be an example of progress.[54]

How, then, may an historian who studies a particular epoch in the history of this particular group of fish-eaters decide whether the new way of life that results from the new way of catching fish is really progressive? According to Collingwood, he must relive both the old and the new ways of life in his mind as wholes, taking into account the conditions and consequences of that change. For instance, "he must ask what was done with the additional fish or the additional leisure. He must ask what value attached to the social and religious institutions that were sacrificed for them. In short, he must judge the relative value of two different ways of life, taken as two wholes."[55]

It is to Collingwood's credit that he does not immediately presume that any technological innovation, in and of itself, constitutes unequivocal progress for man. A great many modern thinkers - many more than expressly admit it - have accepted such a sanguine faith in technology. Collingwood, however, sees the need to evaluate the goodness of a given example of technological change according to its effects on the overall way of life of a group of people.

However, and this is a key question, once we have managed,

one way or another, to relive, or reenact, or totally understand, any two historical periods as "wholes", against what possible standard may we judge their respective "values" to see whether one is a progress over the other? What can possibly be the basis for making the judgement that history is progressive? Shall the standard be the accepted notions of our own present epoch regarding what is good and what is not? But this surely prejudges the issue. In order to know that the standard of the present, or the prevailing political philosophy of our time, if you will, is a higher standard than any previous one, so that it may serve as an objective standard by which to judge the goodness of previous epochs, we must already know that history is progressive. We seem to be caught in an inescapable paradox, yet again.

We may surmise that Collingwood could have attempted to avoid the consequences of this particular line of thinking by following Hegel in presuming that history is rational, and therefore, that one may know that the present, according to the plan discernable in history, is the highest standpoint by which to judge previous epochs, and therefore, reveals objective truth about history. In other words, Collingwood could have posited what we have been calling a "limited" or "theoretical" historicism; he could have posited an end to historicity. But had he so structured his philosophic system, he would be subject to the general difficulty that faces all theoretical historicism - the problem of validating one's theory of history - that I alluded to near the end of Part II. He would

not have been able to avoid the central paradox of historical relativism.

There is a further problem with any recourse to the standard of the present as being the true, objective standard by which to evaluate previous epochs as to their relative goodness. Not all men living at a given time agree with the standard of their particular time and place. Thus, there arises the problem of identifying whose account of the good to accept in a given epoch. Collingwood was horrified by the men of his age who believed that Fascism was the best political order for men. Thus, it is apparent that he did not accept just anyone's notion of what the standard of his age was to be.[56] In my experience with historical study, reflective men rarely agree wholeheartedly with the "values" of the mass of men of their time and place. How are we to decide, then, who should be regarded as authoritative in stating what the standard of the age is? How many advocates for a given account of the good must we collect before we can be sure that it is <u>the</u> standard? Of course, such a procedure would be absurd. We want to accept the opinions only of those who are best able to judge of these matters. But how are we to identify such men? Are we not cast back to psychology? Don't we need some account of the natures of men that will enable us to assess their relative credibility, their reliability in offering an account of what the real moral standard of the age is? And even if we could arrive at criteria by which to judge which men are best, or reasonable, or most likely to be good men and good judges, we are <u>still</u> left with

the philosophic task of deciding for ourselves whether or not the account of what is good and what is not that those we judge to be best offer us is the true one, for this or any other age.[57] Surely Collingwood, whose philosophy of history was meant to be a critique of the notion that an historian may uncritically accept the testimony of past historical "authorities" as to what did or did not happen in some past epoch, would want to be most careful about who to accept as the authority on what the moral standard of any given age is.

All this having been said, it is necessary to add certain qualifications, and acknowledge that there is an ambiguity in Collingwood's thought on the matter of historical progress, especially as that thought is revealed in The Idea of History. Strauss points to the fact that, at times, Collingwood speaks as though he accepts the equality of all ages, rather than that history is unequivocally progressive.[58] Recall what was said earlier about how each age must reinterpret history according to its own principles in Collingwood's system, how historical knowledge, knowledge of nature and man, mathematical knowledge, philosophical knowledge, mental habits and possessions of every kind all change from day to day. Thus:

> The historian who sees the past from the point of view of a present must not be worried by the prospect of a future progress of historical knowledge: "the historian's problem is a present problem, not a future one: it is to interpret the material now available, not to anticipate future discoveries."[59]

With this view, Collingwood seems to have temporarily forgotten his concern that historical kowledge not be made entirely relative, or that there be no truth about history which is not always due to be superseded. This view is a subtle one: with it, I believe, Colingwood wants to assert that all ages are equal in one decisive epistemological sense: no one age can presume that its historical knowledge has more "truth value" than any other age. All ages of historical knowledge deserve to be taken seriously. We cannot know the future, and therefore, present truth is the only truth available to us. Thus, any possibly contradictory future truth can have no meaning for us, and no bearing on the objectivity of our present knowledge of history, of ourselves as thinking beings. Not only must we suspect that this quasi-Nietzschean historicism implies a manifestly unsatisfactory epistemology, I think, but we must wonder whether it can ever be reconciled with the progressivism that characterizes most of Collingwood's thinking.

At any rate, and again as Strauss argues, this second view of history that at times seems to be Collingwood's real view constitutes, upon reflection, merely another sort or progressivism:

> Yet the belief in the equality of all ages leads to the consequence that our interpretation of the thought of the past, while not superior to the way in which the thought of the past interpreted itself, is as legitimate as the past's self-interpretation and, in addition, is the only way in which we today can interpret the thought of the past. Accordingly, there arises no necessity to take seriously the way in which the thought of the past understood itself. In other words, the belief in the equality of all ages

> is only a more subtle form of the belief in progress. [60]

Having held this belief, says Strauss, it would not have occurred to Collingwood to measure the truth or the value of modern thought against earlier thought. One cannot take ancient thought seriously in the decisive sense: one cannot presume that it might be true.

In Part III of this essay, then, I have been examining R.G. Collingwood's particular sort of historicist philosophy as he worked it out in his major writings on philosopohy and historiography. We have seen that Collingwood based his entire philosophy on a conception of the role of history in man's life, and that he thought that a properly worked-out historical philosophy would form the basis of a philosophical system which would teach man his proper place in the world, and thereby, how best to live in it. In an early essay, entitled, "A Philosophy of Progress", Collingwood had this to say:

> The theory of [historical] cycles is Ptolemaic; the theory that from the point of view of the present day history is a progress is Copernican; and the latter is the theory advanced in this essay. [61]

We have seen that, central to Collingwood's historical philosophy, and thus to his historicism, was his belief in progress. It is Collingwood's particular brand of progressivism that sets his historicism apart from either Hegel's "theoretical" historicism, or the "radical" historicism of Neitzsche. It is this progressivism

that makes Collingwood something more than merely an epigone to Hegel, and therefore, of more than passing philosophic interest. For Collingwood, human thought is, in a very real sense, endlessly cumulative. We might, therefore, characterize his thought as a sort of "cumulative historicism." If, today, his writings were more widely read in fields of study outside of philosophy of history and philosophy of art, Collingwood might have considerable appeal, for as George Grant argues, we modern men are dedicated to the idea of progress and man's making of it.[62] This modern faith in progress is grounded primarily in a belief in technological progress, and to this, Collingwood would add the prospect of an endless vista of philosophic progress as well. If Collingwood's philosophy of history is correct, we may expect to progress not only in our knowledge of means to ends, but in our knowledge of which ends to pursue as well. Yet, we must ask where all this is meant to lead. Are we constantly becoming more and more wise, are we getting ever closer to knowing all things? But Collingwood's historicism will not allow him to admit that there can be an ultimate, true, objective, enduring account of "all things." Most importantly, he cannot admit that there is a final account to be given of what man himself is, since every part of his makeup changes from epoch to epoch. Thus, what can "progress" possibly mean for us, on Collingwood's view of the way things are? "Progress," towards what, and from what?

We have seen, I think, that there are serious grounds for doubting the epistemological basis upon which the faith in progress rests. This is not to deny that there can be genuine progress in human affairs, but only to doubt that we can recognize it for what it is, and thereby promote it, if we must believe that everything in the universe, including human thought and the very questions that we think about, is in constant flux. And one must also wonder whether Collingwood's historicism does not trivialize some of the finest achievements of the thought of the past, achievements that might be our best guides for deciding upon what is progressive and what is not.

In The Idea of History, Collingwood says that "... progress is possible. Whether it has actually occurred and where and when and in what ways, are questions for historical thought to answer."[63] In the same book, Collingwood also says that "philosophy progresses in so far as one stage of its development solves the problems which defeated it in the past, without losing its hold on the solutions already achieved."[64] We are, I think, entitled to wonder what this can possibly mean given Collingwood's view that there are no permanent philosophic questions, and in light of his seemingly clear belief that we cannot help but significantly change a past generation's questions when we ask them of ourselves. However, the point that I would like to establish in relation to Collingwood's faith in philosophic progresss is that history has very little to do with deciding whether one philosopher has solved

a problem that defeated a previous one. We cannot adjudicate between philosophers unless we too become philosophers, unless we perform the philosophic task of thinking through all things in their interconnectedness ourselves, to the best of our ability. We may only decide whether or not a philosopher has solved a "problem" by using our own reason to decide upon what counts as having solved a problem: we must have a criterion of problem-solving which we can apply to the divergent thought of two or more philosophers. And at the very least, we must be able to understand "questions" in the same way as do the philosoher(s) in question. History cannot decide these things for us. History only shows us that there have been many proposed solutions to a given philosophic question, not which one of them if any is correct. History is at best penultimate to philosophy. Experience is prior to, but subordinate to, reason. And is it not an open possibility that we, in our capacity as philosophic thinkers, might have to decide, if we do not hold to an untenable progressivism, that an early comment on a problem is wiser than a later one? It is hard to read, for instance, Plato or Aristotle, and not at least suspect that this is the case. And in the last analysis, as I have been emphasizing in this essay, the major problem of philosophy, or of human thought, is the problem of establishing criteria for knowledge. To say, as R.G. Collingwood did, that history solves this great problem seems utterly and hopelessly paradoxical. History cannot be our guide either for our thinking or for our actions.

NOTES TO PART III

[1]R.G. Collingwood, Speculum Mentis (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1924), p.9. Both in Speculum Mentis and in his subsequent philosophic writings, Collingwood extended this pronouncement about the connection between theory and practice to an explicit denial of the pursuit of theoretical knowledge for its own sake. Whether this denial is appropriate or not, either in reference to Collingwood's thought or in general, is a question which I chose to regard as being beyond the bounds of the concern of this essay. By so doing, however, I do not mean to imply that the question is not an important one.

[2]Speculum Mentis, p.26. Collingwood left no doubt as to the validity of Speculum Mentis as a representation of his true philosophic conception. That is, we need not worry that it was an "early work", later to be decisively qualified or repudiated. In An Autobiography, written for the purpose of setting out his thoughts in the order of their development, and as a concise, accessable introduction to his thought, Collingwood wrote that Speculum Mentis was "a bad book in many ways." But he qualified that assessment in a footnote: "Since writing that sentence, I have read Speculum Mentis for the first time since it was published, and find it much better than I remembered. It is a record, not so very obscure in expression, of a good deal of genuine thinking. If much of it now fails to satisfy me, that is because I have gone on thinking since I wrote it, and therefore much of it needs to be supplemented and qualified. There is not a great deal that needs to be retracted." An Autobiography (Oxford University Press, 1939), p.56, emphasis added. I am not aware of anything in any of Collingwood's published works that would repudiate any of what I regard as the substantive details of the historicism expounded in Speculum Mentis.

[3]An Autobiography, p.167.

[4]Collingwood did not so characterize his concern. The expressions "political problem" and "the good for man" that I have used by way of capturing the thrust of Collingwood's project are borrowed from a much older sort of moral philosophy. I believe they are an accurate characterization of Collingwood's concern, however.

[5]It is important to note that Collingwood meant his critique of the possibility of constructing an eternally valid account of human nature to count not only against modern "scientific" psychology, but also against all "philosophic" psychologies as well.

That is, he meant to challenge the accounts of human nature, nay, the very attempts to give such an account, that underlie the thought of the masters of political philosophy from the time of Plato to the present. He makes this especially explicit with reference to Locke. See The Idea of History, p.81-85.

[6]Leo Strauss, in an essay entitled "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History", Review of Meta-physics, Vol. 4, No. 4, June, 1952, alludes to this central tenet of Collingwood's thought as follows: "In other words, it was always admitted that the central theme of philosophy is the question of what man is, and that history is the knowledge of what men have done; but now it has been realized that man is what he can do, and 'the only clue to what man can do' is what he has done; therefore, 'the so-called science of human nature or of the human mind resolves itself into history'. Philosophy of history is identical with philosophy as such, which has become radically historical: 'philosophy as a separate discipline is liquidated by being converted into history.'" Strauss is quoting The Idea of History, pages 10, 220 and 209, and page x of that book's introduction, respectively.

[7]The Idea of History, p.309.

[8]An Autobiography (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.128.

[9]See The Idea of History, Part V, Sec. 5, "The Subject-matter of History."

[10]The Idea of History, p.215.

[11]An Autobiography, p.94.

[12]Ibid. I find myself inclined to agree with Collingwood's objection to the account of the human soul that is given by modern "scientific" psychology. However, I think we should wonder whether Freud and his followers have said all there is to say about the role of irrational compulsion in the activities of men, about the interaction of the mind and the body, and so on. These are complex and difficult problems, and Freud's account of them and their possible solutions is not the only one extant. To have adequately dealt with the "science of human nature", Collingwood would have had to have dealt with certain "philosophic" psychologies. Notably, he would have had to have understood and dealt with Plato's account of the soul as given in Republic. I don't believe he accommplished either part of that task.

[13]An Autobiography, p.95.

[14]Speculum Mentis, p.247.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid., p.248.

[17]Ibid.

[18]An Autobiography, p.95.

[19]An Autobiography, p.2. It seems obvious, both from this particular quotation and on much evidence in other of his writings, that Collingwood's historicist "epistemology" included natural science within its compass. Had Collingwood had an opportunity to read Thomas Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, I feel certain that he would have been sympathetic to Kuhn's relativization of natural science, but with at least one major difference of opinion: Kuhn thought that science is revolutionary, and not subject to net progress, while Collingwood seems to think that science if evolutionary, and somehow progressive.

[20]An Autobiography, p.25.

[21]Ibid., p.26.

[22]I have used the word "know" in reference to Collingwood's account of the mind's working with some trepidation, and have accordingly enclosed it in quotation marks, because I'm not sure that that word can have any meaning, or at least, not its accepted meaning, within Collingwood's account of what thinking is. The term "experience" is Collingwood's own, and better expresses his conception of what the mind does with the consciousness of the world that comes to it.

[23]Speculum Mentis, p.220.

[24]Speculum Mentis, p.194.

[25]Ibid., p.218.

[26]Ibid., p.246.

[27]Ibid., pp.282-283.

[28]Ibid., p.248.

[29]Ibid., p.252.

[30]Ibid., p.249.

[31]An Essay on Metaphysics, p.23.

[32]Ibid., p.25.

[33]Ibid., p.29.

[34]Ibid., p.31.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid., p.72. Emphasis added.

[37]The New Leviathan, p.61. Emphasis is Collingwood's.

[38]Nathan Rotenstreich, Philosophy, History and Politics: Studies in Contemporary English Philosophy of History (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), pp.30-32.

[39]Ibid.

[40]The Idea of History, p.284. Emphasis added.

[41]See The Idea of History, p.229.

[42]Alan Bloom, Editor's Introduction, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, Alexandre Kojève (New York: Basic Books, 1969), p.xii.

[43] In the Use and Abuse of History, Nietzsche sharply criticizes the popular dissemination of historical knowledge, arguing that it does lead and has lead to decadence and nihilism. He also criticizes Hegel's transcendental historicism. Given the perhaps insurmountable difficulty of penetrating to the thoughts that are hidden behind Nietzsche's brilliant irony, it is curious indeed that he chooses to criticize the pernicious effects of the historicism of his day from the standpoint of what seems to be only another sort of historicist philosophy.

[44]For the balance of the essay, I am considerably indebted to Leo Strauss's expostion and critique of Collingwood's thought, expressed in the essay referred to earlier, "On Collingwood's Philosophy of History."

[45]For Collingwood's discussion of how the three factors that I have mentioned revolutionized historiography in 19th century Europe, see especially The Idea of History, "Epilegomena", Sec.2, "The Historical Imagination", and Sec.3, "Historical Evidence."

[46]The Idea of History, p.236.

[47]Ibid., p.164. Emphasis added.

[48]Ibid., p.135. My references to Collingwood's The Idea of History in this footnote and the previous one are also noted by Strauss.

[49]The Idea of History, p.255.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid., p.226.

[52]Strauss, op. cit., p.561.

[53]The Idea of History, p.324.

[54]Ibid., p.325. It is interesting, and perhaps significant, that Collingwood chooses for his example of what progress is a technological innovation.

[55]Ibid., p.327. Collingwood is well aware of the difficulties that are associated with knowing a past way of life as a whole, but brackets them for purposes of his example.

[56]I shall set aside for the time being the related problem of adjudicating between different standards as they manifest themselves in radically different, albeit contemporaneous, cultures.

[57]As the discussion of tyranny in Book IX of Plato's Republic suggests, (if we are alert to Plato's irony), the best natures may be either potential philosophers - the highest, most "reasonable"

men - or they may be potential tyrants. The parallel between the philosophic and tyrannic natures in Republic is a fascinating one, and too complex for explication here. In order to explicate that parallel, one would have to consider the qualities of soul that these seemingly opposite natures exhibit; great eroticism and a sort of "drunkenness", madness, great pride, insatiability, melancholy, perhaps, and so on. One would want to consider the possible irony of passages such as 577 a-b, 573c, and others. In any case, the point here is that we should never be prepared to accept merely on faith, for practical political reasons, as well as philosophic ones, the pronouncements of even the best of men. Just as there can be no "authorities" in history, there are none in philosophy either.

[58]Strauss, op.cit., p.562.

[59]Ibid. Strauss is quoting The Idea of History, p.180.

[60]Ibid., p.574. Strauss does a great deal more with the idea that Collingwood could not have understood the ancient thinkers in the same way that they understood themselves, and that therefore, he could not have understood their thought at its most important levels. This is an important point, but I shall not be developing it in this essay.

[61]Essays in the Philosophy of History (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1965), p.105.

[62]See, for instance, Philosophy in the Mass Age (Copp Clark Publishing, 1966), p.76.

[63]The Idea of History, p.333.

[64]Ibid., p. 332.

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